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FAREWELL TO YOUTH

*“When did music come this way?
Children dear, was it yesterday?”*

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1928

STORM JAMESON



FAREWELL
TO
YOUTH

"King Pandion he is dead."



New York
ALFRED A. KNOFF
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*Dedicated
In all affection
And without her permission
To my very dear friend
EDITH M. MARSTON*

FAREWELL TO YOUTH

CHAPTER I

THIS is the story of young Nathaniel Grimshaw, and since when it ends he is still young enough to feel very old, it must necessarily be shadowed, if not at times overshadowed, by the older people whose lives run a course beside his. But it is his story and not theirs, and opens on his nineteenth year and on himself.

The southern edge of the Hampshire downs broke over his home. Saints Rew is small and perfect. That is to say, imperfect, since a flawless beauty does not suit our English air. The loving blunders of time and man have so worked on Saints Rew that it is as near perfect loveliness as a house may come and still be loved and lived in. It was built in 1587, a house of two storeys, looking to the valley, with one short wing running back towards the downs. The lawns at the front of the house descend in terraces to the sunk hedge and the park. The drive circles the park and comes round between great limes to the north side of Saints Rew. Late in the eighteenth century they added another wing, three-storeyed this time, and so the west end of Saints Rew is a Georgian house of a pure simple dignity, long from back to front. The old house received the newcomer as one well-bred woman would another, aware that both understood the usages of polite society. The years passed, until each had grown to know the other so well that a loving uncertainty prevailed between them. A gable that had always belonged to the elder Saints Rew found itself imperceptibly,

claimed by the younger. Since both were of one mind this was the most natural thing in the world. Even their memories at last became one memory, and the eighteenth-century windows, drowsing over the old lawn, dreamed that they had seen it made. The house was very old now. It dreamed most of the day.

Behind Saints Rew a chalk-white road climbed sharply to the green crest of the downs and vanished in a bridle-path between an avenue of beech trees. On either side, the turf, light under the heels as a dancing floor, ran up and down to find Salisbury Plain. Young Nathaniel lay flat on the edge of the downs and looked across the chimneys of Saints Rew. He could imagine he saw the whole of England in one county. Through the wide trough of the valley a clear stream ran, with the best trout fishing in the south. The gentle opposing slope was patterned with pasture fields and hayricks. A small village disposed itself idly beside the stream. The square belfry of the church, meeting-place for chattering rooks, dominated the straggling houses, as Saints Rew the whole valley. Over it, over manor-house, over belfry and square attendant vicarage, over cottages, trout stream, fields and trees, hung the refracted light of an English sky, not clear, not opaque, not brilliant, not dim, a gentle lucence in which all objects, animate and inanimate, drowse and grow placid and kindly old.

Nathaniel Grimshaw at nineteen looked younger. The thin outline of his face had an indecisive softness that could still, turned to her quickly or come upon unseen, persuade his mother that she saw the little boy he had been and mysteriously had ceased to be. He was dark-haired, with grey eyes, blurred arch of eyebrow, and a boy's mouth. To his mother, who knew him better than most people, he seemed childish and fanciful. But she had never become used to his deepened voice, to the new thinness and hardness of his hands, to the quick compact way

he moved his body. The young man who had appeared in her house with bewildering suddenness was at once strange and terribly familiar to her. She was always watching him. Slight and delicately-boned, impatient and indolent by turns, he had a quick tongue, a contempt for dreams and a headful of them.

He was taking a dreamy sensuous pleasure in the warmth of the short fine grass under his body. He had no right to be at Saints Rew at the beginning of June. He would have been in Oxford if an ill-judged climbing party had not ended in his being caught in the High Street at three in the morning discussing with his friend George Savill the impossibility of climbing back into the House, a disaster neither of them had foreseen. They were sent down for the rest of the term. . . . Staring down into the valley, he saw the carriage, tiny like a carriage made out of a pumpkin, crawling towards Saints Rew. It was like nothing on earth but an enchantment. He would have preferred it to be one, and to vanish, with all his father's guests, since he would have to go down and support his mother in looking after them.

He got reluctantly to his feet and plunged down the road, a white ravine between high hedges, to the door in the wall of the kitchen garden. Thence, by a route leading across orchards and under the mulberry tree, a trap for fools and boys, he came out, a little stained, upon the lawn in front of the house. His mother was there, standing hatless in the sun. He put an arm round her and walked her, protesting to the very threshold, into the house. The hall was cool and dark: his mother's protests ceased, as if the house had shaken a finger at her, and through open windows facing the drive, the scent of limes in flower came in, filling the crannies of the hall with a fugitive sweetness.

"You'll have a headache. Then you'll go to bed and leave me alone with something that your husband dredged up last time he was in town," Nat accused her.

His mother said placidly and mysteriously: "It's another of his scientists, Nat darling, with a daughter this time, not a wife who takes apples to bed like the last one. And will you please explain to me why—since you are supposed to be studying science—you never find anything to say to your father's guests?"

Nat moved away. Ashamed of his impatience, he smiled at his mother. He tilted his head back and smiled at her through his long lashes. In the sunlight, as he leaned against the nearest window, she could see the fine down covering his skin, as smooth as a child's. She saw everything, the lashes resting on his flushed cheeks, the mulberry stain in the corner of his mouth, his shabby clothes, hands deep in pockets, dark bent head, and her heart ached over everything she saw. He was inaccessible to her and defenceless. He did not know he was defenceless. She knew it, and she had to endure her helpless knowledge.

"Nat," she said, "you must see what you can do about some clothes to take back to Oxford. All you have are falling to pieces; I can't mend them. I never could and I'm much too old to begin."

"I can hear the carriage on the drive," Nat said, and disappeared, bounding up the shallow curving staircase, into the shadows of the corridor.

He knew his clothes were disgraceful, but he was not worried by them. Trousers that had walked about school cloisters looked much the same in Tom Quad and the legs inside them felt no different. Stripped for his bath he regarded his slender body with disfavour for its lack of height. The long narrow glass into which he looked being old (it was Florentine), it gave him back an unsubstantial image, white and blurred, like a very young tree standing on the edge of a forest pool. This mirror of his might have been sold for enough money to clothe him like the Argentine millionaire who roomed on his staircase in Tom. Saints Rew was a small treasure house, and his father would not

sell its least treasure. The cellar, once well furnished, might be empty, the tables sparse, his rooms fireless in winter, his son at Oxford on a schoolboy's allowance, his Emily shabbier than any cottage wife, but he would not part with anything at all, not a picture, not a vase, not a jade or ivory group, not a miniature of the famous collection, not a Tudor chest or lacquer cabinet or comfortless Stuart chair, not a crystal from the six great chandeliers made in Venice in 1795 and transported, each piece wrapped in a hundred wrappings, by special courier across a wracked Europe, into the hands of the first Grimshaw to live in Saints Rew.

James Grimshaw was the fourth. He had two ruling passions and neither of them was his wife or his son. His house had one rival. The Sebastian Grimshaw who had bought Saints Rew from its bankrupt owner had found it filled with the rich spin-drift of an ancient family, and left it loaded with other riches for which he raked Europe. He had made money by supplying food to the army, and his son, pursuing researches into the tendency of food to turn rotten even before it could be shipped, stumbled into a chemical works. The third Grimshaw enlarged them, dropped the army contracts, built an admirable laboratory round the three dirty test tubes left by his enquiring parent, and passed to his twin sons, besides Saints Rew, the now famous chemical firm of Grimshaw and Grimshaw.

The young Grimshaws were twenty-two when their father died. They read the will and came to an odd arrangement. James, the younger by an hour, had already broken with the good solid Grimshaw tradition by getting himself from Oxford to the Foreign Office. He took the house, and bartered for it the greater part of his share in the firm. On the tenth left to him he maintained Saints Rew, and gave himself up to the second of his passions, which was knowledge, of a special sort. Promotion came to him very slowly, so slowly that it followed instead of

preceding reputation—a natural reversal of the aristocratic process. Before middle-age he was acknowledged to possess, in a greater degree than any one other person, an accurate understanding of the transactions that since the Congress of Berlin have turned Europe into a mediæval law court, filled with false witnesses, brawlers, rich men carrying bribes, sophists, great nobles, kings, and anxious peasants. The little assistant under-secretary was addressed as a familiar friend in Chanceries and Courts. Even the unchanging formality of his manner could not chill the affection that flowed from and towards him. He knew which farms in a district of Pomerania were filched from their nineteenth-century owners and which boundaries in Balkan Europe had been shifted a few yards during the past month. He had watched Bismarck build up his great bulwark of alliances, and marked the year in which he became a senior clerk by an unofficial argument with M. Clemenceau, who was very hot for *revanche*. Bismarck was dismissed that year and James hurried over to visit him: he was invited to stay and with that grim companion watch Holstein and the young Kaiser "mess it up." Fifteen years later a private messenger brought to Saints Rew the first news to reach England of the meeting at Björkö where Bismarck's master tried to dismiss his own doom.

At a London dinner party the next year James heard an angry Sea Lord say that if England went to war with Germany to help France, he should take the fleet to the Baltic, and if the army chose to assist him well and good. If not, it could find its own way across the Channel and be damned to it. His host drew James aside, and divided between laughter and exasperation, asked his advice. "I should get him dismissed now," James said. "You will in five or six years' time."

From Saints Rew, during his little son's frightful attack of diphtheria, James saw the Balkan dancers set to partners, and Austria, shadowed by Russia and Germany, advancing on Ser-

via under the disapproving eyes of France and his own country. The child recovered. The dancer's feet, dancing his future, changed their places, and the next year James saw Russia stepping out on the other side.

The boy was a long time getting back his proper strength and as James watched him slowly closing his small hands more tightly on life he watched at the same time the shadow falling further and further across Europe towards the child playing languidly under the trees at Saints Rew. When in 1910 his enemy Isvolski went from St. Petersburg as ambassador to Paris James knew that the dancing feet would quicken their measure. He was in Paris when the boulevards were screaming Agadair, and the next year in Berlin in unofficial attendance on his friend Haldane's mission. It was a very grave and honest mission and James did what he could, but it was being danced out of court.

From Berlin he went, without going home, to Paris, to an obscure lodging on the left bank. It was not too obscure for the premier to find him out and come to ask his help with the English Government in "the inevitable war." He was present, and said nothing, at a conference between French premier and Russian ambassador in which the man who loved his country promised Isvolski to support Russia in the Balkans. From this moment, James began to count in hours the time that lay between it and the war.

He was now sixty and had been permanent assistant under-secretary for ten years. There was a strong and uneasy feeling that something should be done for him, and since nothing more could be done by the Foreign Office, he was retired and rewarded with a K.C.B.

This was less than two months before a Liberal government gave birth to the department of International Intelligence. Formed, as everyone knows, to correlate the information pour-

ing into all departments, the new ministry was projected as a kind of super-brain of the Cabinet. Following a perfectly natural impulse, it was deprived from the beginning of any executive power. But by one of those spontaneous acts of justice that occasionally transfigure our political scene, Sir James Grimshaw was invited to become its first Minister. A seat was found for him and he accepted. In the same week his brother Daniel won a bye-election for the Liberal Party. He disapproved strongly of James's appointment. From his lonely eyrie James listened to the conversations between his country and France, watching foreign secretaries and generals exchanging war-maps and plans and counting in advance the heads of their young dead. He saw the Balkan dancers leap up again, with Russia grinning over Servia's shoulder, and knew how little time there was left. When they fell apart among themselves, he found a brief pleasure in getting back for a Macedonian peasant the well he had been deprived of ten years before. It was a solitary act of justice in the arrangements that ended a war of outraged nationalities by giving to all the victors some part of another nation's property.

This year (it was 1913) his son was eighteen, and James paid a visit to Paris at the time of the Presidential election. M. Poincaré was very civil to him. He had just been told that James was using Mesopotamia and the Baghdad railway to bring Germany closer to England. He redoubled his civility. One night James dined between the new President and the Russian ambassador. He knew that Russia meant to have the Straits and that she was afraid of revolution at home. He knew that France was lending money to build railways crossing Poland to the German frontier, and that her generals were afraid for their new three-year service bill. He knew that the preparations of France and Germany had feverishly increased and that his own country was concentrating her fleet in the North Sea. He knew

everything that his two fellow-guests knew. He did not know, and neither did they, whether war would come in time to save Russia from her rebels and France from herself, or the exact moment when his son would fall under the feet of the dancers. He offered salt to M. Isvolski and accepted a light for his cigar (he loathed cigars) from M. le Président. Going back to his hotel afterwards, he found Emily sitting up in bed with a file of English newspapers. She had left half-a-crown with the gardener to put on a horse, and was trying to make up her mind. "I shall put it on this one," she said at last, and handed James the newspaper to look at. He watched her bring out from under the pillow, together with a watch, a photograph of Nat, a crucifix and the garments among which she had distributed her money, a postcard and a stub of pencil. She licked it and wrote: *Dear Harris, please put what you know of on Moonraker. She is a vegetarian horse, fed largely on oranges, the papers say. Sure to be fit.* Sighing with relief, she tumbled the papers on the floor and lay down. Her tired eyelids slid over her eyes, fluttered up once, to let her look at James, closed again. Emily was asleep.

The same year Jean Jaurès stayed a night at Saints Rew. As he talked to James a summer dawn, coming upon them unexpectedly, made him look like an angry ghost. Then he stood up stiffly and said: "My country is a woman with two lovers. The Lorrainer will get her yet. But he'll get me first. . . ."

James was handicapped among the Poincarés and the Greys by his inability to take them seriously as portents. He did not believe that wars are made by a few great men. He did not believe in the importance of great men. They seemed to him like the summer lightning he watched, from a window in Saints Rew, playing over the fields and wide valleys, bright, ominous, running across the earth, and swallowed up in its calm depths as if it had never existed. When he sat, at dinner and council tables, between men whose names filled the political and social columns

of the newspapers he recalled that the real tale of life came in the end to a peasant stooping over the wrinkled earth, on whose surface the activities of these others made as little mark as did the bodies of the men who had died fighting over it in forgotten centuries and been buried where they died.

James had married rather late in life, and though he loved his Emily and somewhat absentmindedly gave her a son, while forgetting to give her clothes or money, he could not truthfully have been said to rise up or to lie down with anything but his passion for perfection, the perfect house and the naked truth. He had all his life regarded Saints Rew and knowledge as women and he gave them all he had, himself, passion, courtesy, kindness. The young woman he married, when he was nearer forty than thirty, was the only woman in the world who would have been willing to cherish a man so absorbed. She drew on his inexhaustible kindness and courtesy, and comforted herself for having missed great happiness. A little happiness can be held securely in one hand. Her James was never unfaithful to her because he had never been faithful. He gave her what love he could give to one person, and gave as much to everything weak or in need of him. A man had only to be poor, unjustly treated, or under a cloud, for Saints Rew to become to him a refuge. The old house had sheltered Kropotkin, Delcassé, James Keir Hardie, and an almost countless number of scientists, real and sham, artists on their uppers, politicians out of a job, foreign revolutionaries escaped from prison, and city clerks with their families, in need of a holiday. Nothing disturbed James Grimshaw or confused him. He accepted all men and all women at their face value with the unquestioning faith which a mother has for her new-born child. Saints Rew received them new-born, and after a few days in the house, sometimes after a few hours, habitual liars began to imagine the truth, vain men to practise

reverence and shams to discover their pitiful core of reality. Either that or they left, alarmed and abashed.

He was a little man, smaller and lighter than his son, and lovable. His Emily loved him. A sleepless servant, looking out of her window in the middle of any night, was very likely to see James striding about the lawns and walks with Emily trotting at his side. Here and there James stopped to gesticulate with an arm raised to heaven and a pointing finger. Emily listened, nodded. He set off again, and the watcher saw her start into a trot, pushing frantically at the wisps of hair about her face. She had a lively and disorderly mind. No care had ever been taken to direct what was a remarkable intelligence. When she married a man whom they could call "Emily's little chemist" her family began angrily to pity her. They had pitied her now for twenty years, during which time she had grown thinner and shabbier and more active, until she was most like a quivering nerve with a small bone or two attached. From Nat she had learned a trick of mild profanity. She was very gentle with servants and in the cottages whose poverty wrung its last drops out of her purse. But visitors to Saints Rew, whose opinions had offended her, sometimes overheard themselves being damned and blasted in a low voice from behind a half-open door, and their shocked ears recognised it for the voice of that tired old lady, their hostess. Nat sometimes came upon her swearing quietly to herself in a corner. Like a ruffled little old cat. From the undisciplined reading with which she filled long lonely hours she had acquired a mass of irreconcilable beliefs. She never tried to reconcile them. A conservative by birth, she became a socialist and a friend of revolutionaries. Naturally sceptical, she read Newman's apology and when Nat was a schoolboy she went, as they say, over to Rome. But she made no attempt to take with her on that journey either her son or her husband. She was like James in that one thing: she never interfered with the minds of

other people. Shabby—James had no money for her—eager, loyal, she was not less a woman than a little bundle of warring prejudices. To the end of her days she retained the dreadful clear logic of a child. She spoilt her son—that is to say, she never pretended to him that she was wise or clever or just. Nat knew her to be quixotic, prejudiced, and wildly unreasonable, and to the end of his life she remained for him the very image and womanly token of wisdom and love.

He was thinking about her as he got into his dress clothes. She worried about his clothes, but everyone in the village knew that Mrs. James Grimshaw had scarcely a rag to her back. Nat could not remember any time when he had not understood that Saints Rew was more important than the people who lived in it. He saw it adorned with his mother's clothes and jewels, and with the cricket bats, the camera, the fishing rod, and the dress shoes he had never been allowed to buy.

He was to have spent his Easter vacation in Germany, working under Mayer, but Saints Rew had made the trip instead. At any rate, she had had the money.

The frown that had already drawn two neatly curved lines between his eyebrows deepened as he walked down the stairs from his bedroom. On the first landing he hesitated. He heard voices to the right, in his mother's sitting-room—his mother's soft husky speech and another voice, clear, very pleasant. The daughter.

“Rabbit teeth and a yellow neck,” Nat speculated, passing on.

Halfway down the stairs he heard a terrific voice: “The perpetuation of life is not of the least importance,” followed by a burst of coughing. Disliking noise and sick men with an equal loathing, he hesitated again, and was caught by the opening of his mother's door.

“Ah, there's my son. Nat.”

He turned, and had his first sight of Denny Sadgrove. She

was slender, an inch or two taller than himself, and so pretty that he lost a breath or two as he stood looking at her. Then he ran back and took her hand. "My son, Miss Sadgrove."

In one and the same moment he noted her pouted mouth, the shining gold of her hair, the scent she used, and a crack across the top of his old pumps. In the same moment he fell in love with her, and through dinner fell deeper, until even the pretence of eating became intolerable. He gave it up and waited for the moment when he could take her to see the gardens. Her father, a physicist whose name Nat had hitherto respected, ate voraciously between paroxysms of coughing, as if he could not feed his life fast enough to keep it from running away. Nat loathed him more with every moment. "She isn't his daughter," he assured himself. "He stole her. I wish he'd die." Denny kept her eyes on her plate, putting away, in the most delicate manner possible, as hearty a meal as Saints Rew afforded.

James Grimshaw never knew that he had a cold unless someone told him. Then he examined his streaming eyes in the glass with innocent interest. He would have received the news that he was dying with the same unconcern, and death would probably interrupt him in the middle of a word, just as when he was going on a journey he went on talking to the last moment, and sometimes finished ten years afterwards a sentence broken off by the abrupt departure of his train. He talked to his dying friend not as if the moment of departure were almost on them, but as if Sadgrove had only to go on listening in order to remain alive.

"I should like to have seen Germany again," Sadgrove exclaimed harshly.

"The most delicate-minded man I know is a German," James said thoughtfully. "He lives in a castle in Pomerania. His wife is immensely fat and to console her he tries to grow fatter still.

He eats and drinks incessantly. It's all useless. He's thinner than I am."

Sadgrove had another fit of coughing. Before it was over James had got from a castle in Pomerania to the West Indies. He reminded Sadgrove of an evening when they waited in Santa Cruz, part of a deputation of Danish officials and distinguished foreigners, to welcome the new Danish Governor. He arrived, surrounded by his six native wives and their families of children—all of whom had to be packed into the carriages intended for the deputation. The six wives divided the plaudits of the crowd between them, but the new Governor was peevish. "I feel sick," he said to James. "This is a very fine city, please to indicate to me without delay where I can be purged."

Sadgrove chuckled, a queer sound like the turning of a rusty key. It was the door of his youth opening behind him. He straightened himself cautiously and looked over his shoulder. He nodded to Nat.

"Your father handed him out of the reception hall with perfect tact," he said. "No one noticed he had gone, because only one wife having been expected, there were only two state chairs and the six were scrambling for place."

Nat smiled back at him. There's no harm in the man, beyond his revolting cough, he thought, and began to feel ashamed of himself.

"I don't know how the fat horrid little wretch got six women to marry him," Emily said vigorously.

"They were quite happy," James answered. With infinite care he led Sadgrove back to London.

"We haven't eaten together since the eighties," he said gently. He spoke to Nat. "I used to come up to town with five pounds in my pocket. I had very little money to spend then, and I enjoyed spending it. Those were London's great days. To get into a hansom, pick up Sadgrove at his Jermyn Street lodging and

bowl over the river to hear Kitty Nicholson sing, and afterwards to feed Kitty at a little place in Panton Street. She ate like a bird."

"A roc," Sadgrove ejaculated.

"I paid once for Kitty to peck a large goose to pieces with her little teeth. It broke the back of my fiver."

Sadgrove had not coughed for ten minutes.

"All this wildness," Emily said, "was before he married. He used to call on me wearing a sort of burglar's cap with ear flaps, and riding a bicycle which he chained to the railings of my father's house in South Audley Street. Bicycles were considered very dangerous then." She thought for a moment of a girl pressing her laughing face between the curtains to get a sight of her lover chaining up his bicycle. Some one laughed in the room behind and the girl's face became fiercely grave.

Nat looked from Sadgrove to his father. He tried to see their London, a man's London, in which women played only a few rigidly defined roles. It fascinated him. He felt childish and inexperienced. All at once he was sorry for them both. To have bought a goose for Kitty was nothing much to set against falling in love with Denny Sadgrove. He glanced across the table. The candles in its centre made a pool of soft light. Denny sat half in shadow. He thought that the small curve of her chin would fit his hand, and had to shut his eyes for a moment. Pressing his hollow young waist against the edge of the table he waited for dinner to end. It was over at last, and Nat hurried the girl out. The night was clear and still: the river running softly in the valley and the sliding of branch on branch in the elm trees were all Nat heard. He walked beside Denny very conscious of his shabby clothes. He thought he caught her smiling at them. She could talk, he found, and after she had made an unusually witty comment on marriage he thought gloomily: "She's clever as well as beautiful. I haven't a chance." A year or two later, coming

upon the very comment as he sat reading in a dugout in France, he was puzzled by an echo, but he did not remember an old tree, planted by the second Charles and now so high that it swung its branches in at the window where Charles had slept, nor a June sky, dark and high and spattered with stars, nor the scent of limes, nor the curve of Denny's throat as she got off her borrowed wisdom. Yet he had noticed them at the time, and thought it impossible to forget anything she had said or any gesture of her delicate bare arms or any scent of all the drifts of scent they came upon and walked through.

He kept her out until ten o'clock. He had lost his head but not his tongue. Excitement loosened that, and once or twice he shocked her by the profanity of his comments on people and ideas. She came to the conclusion that he was both conceited and innocent. Before they went in she had discovered that his smile was more attractive than her own. He halted her for a moment outside the house to listen and hear how even at night a surge and a murmur, like the sea on a very distant shore, clung about the avenue of limes. She pretended to hear it, watching his profile, young, pure, and haughty, in the faint light. Suddenly she said: "You can kiss me good-night if you like."

Nat turned to her eyes wide and brilliant. She thought it a trick of the ghostly light that made him pale. He leaned forward and brushed her lips with his, not the kiss she had expected, then ushered her gravely into the house. In the lighted hall she saw that he was actually very pale.

He watched her go upstairs to bed after taking a somewhat elaborate leave of his mother, who cut her short. From the half-landing she smiled at him, but he did not smile back. She was his first love and he knew none of the rules.

When he went up to bed himself, some impulse led him to visit the rooms on the first floor. His mother's sitting-room, with

its amber velvet hangings, faded and very frail, was filled with moonlight and otherwise empty. Emily Grimshaw's thin restless little body made no commotion in her house, and no impression even on her own room. Nat stopped here to finger a book laid open on the window seat, and to collect the memory of a tiny boy standing on that book to help himself on to the seat. The child was sad, having asked for a red jacket with gilt buttons seen in the village shop, and been refused. He was sure it would have suited him very much. The memory became so sharp that Nat felt sorry for his dejected young self sitting there looking through the darkening window at a sky as red as a red jacket. He seemed a nice little boy, Nat thought.

From his mother's room he passed into the drawing-room. A faint green light came in through the uncurtained windows. Nat went round the whole room, pausing where the child had paused most often, trying to remember his exact sensations before a great globe of glass, finer than silk, and faintly stained with colour. This room had a volume to itself in the catalogue of James Grimshaw's possessions.

Drawing-room, ante-room, White Room, Lacquer room, Claude room, one opening into the next, Nat went through them all. He came at the end to a window whose glass curved forward like the flank of a ship. He was conscious of a new feeling for his house. His father would die and Saints Rew, his real widow, would turn to his son for support. He would give her over to a flesh and blood girl. Denny should drink her tea from the Rockingham lining the White Room's walls. She should cut its silk brocade into dresses for her beauty. It did not occur to the boy that he might take and sell everything. Saints Rew, a wife still and not a widow, had too firm a hold on him. Besides which, she owed him a sweeter and more subtle revenge for the red jacket and the crack across his slipper.

He went to bed and lay awake. His eyes were as wide and

brilliant as Denny had seen them. Why not, since they were opened again on her face? He could see her with a barely endurable clearness. He lay stiffly, recalling every detail. How she had turned to him, how her voice had sounded. He was distressed because he could not remember whether she had said: "You can kiss me good-night," or just: "You may kiss me." To have forgotten a word of the miracle. Unconsciously his mouth shaped itself for the caress. He shut his eyes, and she was behind them. With a sound between a cry and a sob he rolled over in bed.

"You dear," he whispered. "You *dear*. Oh blast it. I haven't a penny, not a penny."

When Emily came in to look at him he was asleep, with his cheek crumpled into the pillow. With infinite caution she pushed back the dark hair falling over his eyes. He opened them and said dreamily: "Is that you, darling? I'm having a —small—private—sleep." Emily gave him a minute to tumble again into the depths. Then she kissed him. His mouth was softened in sleep. Emily thought fiercely: "No other woman does that yet. It hasn't happened yet." Let it never happen, said her heart.

CHAPTER II

DENNY SADGROVE and her father left the next morning. The old physicist coughed and choked himself out of the house. He refused the carriage and went down the drive between his daughter and James, making a noise like a little water running under the mill in the valley. The carriage followed him at a walking pace, with the visitors' sparse luggage, ready to pick him up at whatever point during the five miles to the station at Stockbridge he might give in. The coachman said apologetically to Emily that it was the first time he had known the hearse to follow the corpse.

Nat was out, unwarned of this early departure. He returned and heard about it. A faint compression of his mouth conveyed no meaning to his mother. He almost said: "But, darling, I *love* her," and then could not bring himself to speak without being sure of Denny. He knew what would happen when he did speak. His mother would say: "Oh Nat, how dreadful, I can't bear it. You're far too young. Of *course* she'll have you. Any girl would. But why need you be engaged? Can't you just write to her or send her flowers or something? It costs such a lot of money. You know I haven't any, I never have. Darling, it's too dreadful. I hate all women." A few moments later he would hear her soft voice moaning down the telephone to his Uncle Daniel's wife. "Oh Fanny, isn't it *dreadful*? Of course she will. She'll clutch him and run off with him before I turn round. *I* can't stop him. All men are fools, and Nat's such a baby." Letters would fly between Emily and her own family, illegible with

Emily's complaints and his relations' angry advice, after deciphering which Emily would quarrel with them all for criticising her son.

Nat smiled at his mother. Her heart moved painfully in her thin body. She was convinced, since James had never told her anything about herself, that nobody but Nat practised that trick of lowered lashes.

Nat laid his plans. They were simple, and so guileless that a more experienced woman than Emily Grimshaw might have been deceived. He waited for two days and then said that he must go to London at once, to work at South Kensington. His father's name would frank him into the laboratory. He could live with his friend Savill. Very cheaply. About a pound a week. Say thirty shillings. "Surely you can manage it," he said to Emily. He hated himself as soon as he had said it. Begging for money. His urgency hardened his face into unaccustomed lines.

James had just received a bookseller's letter, offering him a Strawberry-hill copy of Hannah More's poems. He was on the point of writing off to buy it. Since he had already given Saints Rew his son's German visit, to balance matters a little he tore up the bookseller's letter and gave Nat the price of the book. "It is of no particular moment," he said wistfully to Emily. "Except that I wanted it."

Emily was torn between two loyalties. "I don't believe that big noisy woman could write poems worth buying," she said at last. She added ten pounds to James's "present," grumbling and declaring that she was left in sordid rags. Nat took it. He kissed her and rubbed his smooth cheek against hers. To get to London he would have let her sell her last shabby frock. Saints Rew had already had all the others. . . .

The night before Nat went he could not sleep. About midnight he got up and slipped out of the house. The road to the downs gleamed faintly, slippery with dew. The downs them-

selves were wet and silver-grey. As Nat climbed up the white path he heard the small night sounds, a wakened bird scuffed in the hedge, sending a shower of drops over him from a swinging branch, some tiny animal parted the long grass on his right with a sound like a faint whisper. But when he stood on the edge of the downs there was complete silence round him. A late-rising moon moved below the edge of the sky, and the stars paled before her. Nat watched her swing up and out in a smother of light. From where he stood Saints Rew was hidden by the great trees at her back, but the windows fronting the lawn would be washed by that tide, rippling across the world from the hull of the moon. The restlessness that had driven Nat out of the house was lodged in his chest, where his heart seemed to have got loose and to be floating round in disconcerting fashion. He folded his arms over it and sat down on the soaked grass. Reluctance to leave Saints Rew was fighting in him with his ache for Denny. He hated lies, especially when they came off . . . He could not tell his mother the truth yet. There was nothing to tell. When he had seen Denny again . . . The antics of his heart between his ribs made him giddy. He flung himself down on the grass, and let it beat against the ground. A faint warmth lingered in the earth under the heavy dew. It stole through his senses, with the thin fresh scent of soil and wet grass. In a very little time he felt tranquil again and could think calmly of Denny. They would say, his mother would say, that he was too young to know what he wanted. Nat smiled to himself. A week ago it might have been true. He had wanted so few things and those all childish. "Oh, my dear," he whispered, "my only dear, I shall never want anything but you."

His clothes were soaked when he got up to go, leaving a dark shadow of his thin young body on the grass. He never noticed it. The honeysuckle drenched him afresh, with scent and dew, as he ran down the road. "Sweet," he said, and stopped to put a

spray in his button-hole. Sweet, sweet, sweet, honeysuckle, cool night, and love in a boy's heart. Nothing sweeter, nothing so sweet again.

There was a light under his mother's door. He pushed it open gently. Emily was sitting up in bed, feverishly reading, by the light of two candles, a book with a lurid cover showing a man pinned to the carpet by a knife through his neck. Her eyes were starting out of her head.

As Nat came in she dropped the book. "Darling," she said, "this is the most dreadful story. The blood soaked through the floor and came dripping on the table underneath where they were having dinner. Plop, plop. Did you ever hear anything so revolting? Why do people write these things?"

"For wicked old ladies to read when they ought to be asleep," Nat said.

"Why aren't you asleep yourself?" his mother retorted. She put a hand on him and starting up in bed, exclaiming:

"The boy's soaking. Nat!"

Nat took hold of her hands. "It's only dew," he said mischievously. "Did you think it was blood? I brought you this."

All at once, as he gave her the honeysuckle, he felt like crying.

CHAPTER III

FROM Waterloo Nat drove to his friend's rooms in Queen Street. That dark narrow backwater of Curzon Street felt hot and close when he dived into it from his cab. He was so sure of finding George at home that he paid off his cab and watched it manoeuvre round the corner before he rang. The shabby door opened on a first check to adventure. Mr. Savill was away for a few days; not expected home until tomorrow. The housekeeper's eyes in their creased brown pits examined Nat closely. Mrs. Clemens had seen a good many young men of Nat's sort, but that was before she left her Hampshire village to marry James Clemens, when she was housemaid, then under-housekeeper, and finally housekeeper up at the manor-house. It was so long ago now that it had become in her mind a mere whisper of green fields and clear brown streams, the memories of the child who had grown up in the benevolent shadow of The Hall. Nat's face woke a memory that was at once nearer and less vivid—long stone passages, the scent of dried herbs, spiced smell of the big kitchen where her friend Mrs. Grace prepared for the family meals that had been consumed and passed into everlasting life in the memory of Mrs. Clemens, the panelled doors of her linen cupboards, and the shining warmth of an old horse-hair chair standing in the sun in the window of her room, the Housekeeper's Room, where she entertained her friend Mrs. Grace and on occasion the butler and a visitor's manservant, pleasant gentlemen for the most part, and superior in intelligence and bearing to poor James Clemens, for whose sake (the others never asked

her to marry them) she had forever lost that comfortable society . . . These memories and a hundred scents and sounds too faint and mingled for her mind to seize, passed through it in the instant when Nat spoke to her. They clouded her eyes. When they cleared, Nat was lifting his hat and turning from the door, suitcase in hand.

"Can I tell Mr. Savill, sir?"

"I'm a friend of Mr. Savill," Nat said quickly, glad to delay for a moment the ordeal of finding an hotel. "My name is Grimshaw. I suppose you couldn't tell me of an hotel? Not too dear. London's full of them, I know, but I never stayed in one."

Mrs. Clemens hesitated. "I *have* a room," she murmured. "That is—it's not really one I let. It's my son's, but he's away this week." She recognised on Nat's face the ingratiating smile with which Young Gentlemen, home from school, had been used to waylay her, their good kind Mrs. Nance, for favours and help. She let Nat make love to her with eyes and voice for half a minute and then took him in, as she had meant to do.

She showed him into a dark little bedroom under the roof and left him there, to put his clothes away behind a curtain, and then to sit on the edge of his bed. No air came in through the narrow window. There was a skylight in the roof. Standing on the bed Nat prized it open and put his head through. He got a sight of London, very lovely in the sun, acres, dipping and rising, of misty roofs scrawled over with spires and chimneys and blotted with trees. Nat's spirits rose wildly. He loved everything he saw, including the gully of Queen Street below his nose.

Propping the skylight open, he got down again, wondering whether he could ask Mrs. Clemens for a cup of tea. George should have been here to instruct him in the habits of a man about town . . .

George Savill was one of those young men—rare in our day, when the childhood and youth of their children is prolonged as

long as parents can afford to prolong it—who at twenty-three appear mature, with the air and assurance of an experienced man. His face, with its high nose and clear ruddy colouring, had set in the lines it would retain unchanged for another ten years at least. It was a sleepy good-tempered young face. He would have been perfectly in place in the dissipated society of the late eighteenth century, when at twenty-three he would already have made the grand tour, gamed away part of his fortune, lost a mistress, been gazetted to his county militia and approached Mr. Pitt for a job. Half a century later, he might still, at that age, have fought an election or two, and started a family. In 1914, since no one expected anything else of him, he lived very comfortably at Oxford, waiting until his father decided to start him in the first division of the Foreign Office. He was four years older than Nat, and a decade older in manner—his manners were benevolent—and habits of mind. He looked more experienced than he was. He never doubted that he could govern a nation but he had never tried. And though he had thought about women and looked at them expertly he was still materially innocent. This was due a little to laziness, but more to the normal decency of youth . . . His nickname of The Duchess had followed him from his school. The Duchess wore a small moustache, a lingering modern echo of the moustached and whiskered undergraduates of an earlier day. It sealed the amiable self-assurance of his face. . . .

He roomed on Nat's side of Tom Quad, and Nat met him during his first bewildering week in Oxford. Too diffident to talk to the great man, he remained for a long time on shy nodding terms. On the second occasion of their meeting Nat was leaving a birthday party with a large palm tree under his arm. His host was reproaching him. "I've got to pay for that palm. Have a carnation instead. Do, my dear fellow." Looking on at the scene,

The Duchess reflected that Nat was one of those rare persons whom drink makes more attractive.

(*"I would give anything to carry my wine!"* thought Dick Steele, watching young Esmond, *"like this incomparable young man. When he is sober, he is delightful; and when tipsy, perfectly irresistible."*)

George took the flushed smiling boy back to his college, and then returned the palm. At ten o'clock the next morning Nat knocked at his door. "You were caught with that revolting plant," he said shyly. "What did it cost you?"

George smiled and yawned. "My fine, I think."

Nat sat down and held his head. "Don't," he begged. "I feel splendid but I believe I'm still a little drunk. I'll never do it again. What an ass I must have made of myself. Tell me what I owe you."

"The truth of the matter is," George Savill retorted, "that you're full of all the wrong sorts of pride. If it were the other way round, I should be keeping out of your way in case you were going to ask me for the money." Nat felt suddenly that he was making a further ass of himself. He gave it up and smiled at the Duchess through lowered lashes. George Savill winced at a sensation which he took to be pain until he discovered, when Nat had gone, that it was affection. He took the trouble to walk round the quad to ask Nat to lunch, quite certain, since no one ever refused his invitations, that the boy would come. He ordered the lunch first, cold duck and meringues. His stomach was the youngest thing about him.

Their friendship, which survived this dreadful meal, to Nat at least was pure pleasure. It had the fugitive beauty, the rare half-realised sweetness of close friendship between any young men. It had more—it had Oxford. The friendship of Nat and George Savill embraced the long shadows falling over the House meadows, the river wrinkling behind their canoe, shirts and

waitscoats in shops in the High Street, Magdalen tower against a May sky, the green deep waters above Parson's Pleasure, young men's voices from punts moving slowly between fields of buttercups, small gay tables set out on turf running down to the river, the branches of trees parting gently to let the sun touch the green and brown water to a flickering white flame, sunlight turned to wine on the panelling of old halls, and rooms opening off narrow staircases thronged thick with young ghosts. They talked until late at night in Savill's room. They discussed art, Europe, music, and—seldom—woman. Half unconsciously, the Duchess kept back some of his urbane and arrogant self-knowledge. Nat was his innocence of mind. He was almost aware that he had never had any other . . . An expert musician, he undertook Nat's musical education. He played to him patiently for hours, creating in his friend's mind a new dream for every one he destroyed. Sometimes when Nat left him, the floor of the quad was washed with moonlight, so that the boy seemed to walk ankle-deep in a watery silver.

This was probably the happiest year of Nat's life. Oxford emptied itself into his dreaming mind, until Oxford and his friend became two halves of the same dream, an enchantment that time might remove but would not repeat. He seldom thought of the two apart. Oxford was very lovely in the spring of 1914. . . .

As he sat swinging his legs in his attic bedroom, he was thinking less of the girl he had come to London to find than of his friend. He discovered in himself a profound reluctance to tell George about Denny. The prospect of such self-revelation made him blush. He got up hurriedly and went out to find Sadgrove's address.

It took him some time, since the old scientist, growing daily poorer and sicker, had given up his job at University College and drifted out of sight. Nat did not know that Denny had

carefully left behind her a hair-brush and written to Emily to forward it, begging that "your kind son should post it off for me." Emily had posted it herself. She was not consciously suspicious but she did not like Denny. Gingerly exploring the boisterous efficiency of a London college, Nat ran down a student who had sometimes been tutored in the old man's rooms and remembered the address. He checked himself on the edge of rushing straight off, and wrote to Denny instead, a boy's letter, in which he forgot to tell her he loved her but said that he was proud because she liked him. Then he went back to Queen Street. This time Mrs. Clemens met him in the passage, and asked him if he would like tea. Nat accepted gratefully and ten minutes later he sat in the window of his bedroom with a tray balanced on his knees. He began to wonder what Mrs. Clemens would charge him for his room. His pocket-book held four five-pound notes in an inner compartment. Nat rattled the loose change of a sovereign in his pocket and decided to do without dinner. He had read somewhere that eaten slowly a small meal was as satisfying as a large one. He did not put much faith in the theory but he gave it a chance. When the last drop of tea had been drained from the pot and the last piece of bread chewed and longingly swallowed he got out his notebooks and tried to work. The bustle of traffic in Curzon Street drew him to the window again. Below him on the opposite side of the street a young man in tails and a tall hat emerged from a house. The life of the town had moved west from the city. It surged along the Strand to Pall Mall and Piccadilly, with eddies that ran south round the Green Park and north past Devonshire House. Queen Street was filled with the chuckling murmur of its tide.

Nat felt both depressed and excited. The two sensations fought it out in his thin body with a vigour that made him dizzy. Tomorrow and Denny were too far off and too sweet to

bear thinking of. He found that so long as he kept his head out of the window he could take a pleasure in the incidents of the street; a girl walked by in a rose-coloured cloak, a cat played ridiculously with a puppy and a dejected cabby came past singing a hymn and threw a biscuit to the puppy. When he brought his head back into the room and bent it over his book the thought of Denny became distracting. He threw the book on to the bed and went out. Dusk was thickening in the streets when he had walked as far as Leicester Square, a London dusk in summer, composed of scent, petrol, sweat, lamplight striking up through dusty branches, lengthening shadows falling east out of Piccadilly, noise of motors hurrying between restaurants, clubs and theatres, murmur of voices squeezed thin by the heat of the day, light-shod feet on hot pavements, odours of food, garlic and *vin de maison* escaping from little cafés, scent of roses in the emptying baskets of flower-girls, of women's bodies, of fruit exposed all day on barrows, a mingled incense ascending to the veiled sky of crowded life, corruption, and death. It is the headiest of wines to unaccustomed palates. It went instantly to Nat's head. He sauntered along the pavement, trying to dissemble his happiness. Unconsciously, his eyes gathered the smiling glances of women's eyes. He had no idea how attractive he was to them, nor how his young mouth and the mischief in his glance invited theirs. He was very young and drunk with the town.

He hesitated outside the Empire. The absurd thought crossed his mind—it would have crossed Emily's—that he was money in hand because he had not dined. He went in. The clerk in the box-office glanced at the note held carelessly between his fingers and pushed over a returned ticket. Inside, he found that he had bought a seat in the middle of the front row. The sudden plunge from real to unreal confused him, and for some time he sat sleepily, drugged by the hot motionless air and the heavy sense

of people at his back, thinking of Denny. Unexpectedly, an elderly charwoman, the worse, as they say, for drink, wandered on to the stage and at once Nat woke up. He had never seen Marie Lloyd and he had never imagined anyone like her. She clutched a bird-cage to her frowsy bosom and called tipsily on her little cock-linnet. She was rich, she was superb, Falstaff's kin. Nat roared with laughter. He dug the stranger beside him in the ribs and told him that there had been nothing since Shakespeare until Marie Lloyd. His laughter drew amused glances and made his slight body ache. She went off, and coming back as a battered failure of a woman wrung his heart with the savagery of her experience. The audience laughed heartily. Furious with them, Nat growled: "Damned fools, it isn't funny," but she sang again, in satin and ostrich feathers, and made him chuckle. If she was like Falstaff she was also like Queen Victoria. She was the vulgar soil from which the Victorian age sprang. Her gross lively body gathered up the scents, sweats and sounds of the streets outside the theatre, with their furtive women and tired shop-girls, opulent Levantines in carriages, old men in their clubs, hucksters, harlots, young men walking with dreams, the couples locked together on the misty grass of the parks, and the rich slow life of the country outside the town. Nat wondered whether Kitty Nicholson had been as funny. He had just given his verdict against the ancients when he caught sight of his uncle Daniel Grimshaw, and his aunt Fanny, in a box on his left. Behind them sat his father. "How like him to let me come up alone this morning," Nat thought. He knew that his father had done it so that his son should feel quite free, and not a schoolboy visiting London with his parents. He loved his father for that delicacy.

They were not looking at him, and afraid, after his late excesses, to make himself more conspicuous by going out, he kept his seat until the end of the show. In the lobby, he hung about,

waiting for them. With luck, he thought, he might get asked to supper. His excitement had fallen heavily to the pit of his stomach. There was nothing to break the fall.

He saw his uncle at the back of the crowd. Daniel Grimshaw was taller by inches than any man there. He was also the most elegant man Nat knew. His clothes were always formal and rather old-fashioned in cut, and he contrived, with his aquiline nose and small mouth (model for Nat's), to suggest an even older fashion. "He ought to be going on to Almack's," Nat thought. "He looks more like Palmerston than ever. I suppose he knows it." He answered Daniel's nod of recognition with a grave little bow. The crowd broke a little in front of them and he hurried forward to greet his aunt. "You do look beautiful," he said honestly.

Fanny Grimshaw leaned heavily on a stick and her brother-in-law's arm. Nat could remember her as a woman of, he supposed, thirty. Then she was the most exquisite creature he had ever imagined. When she stooped her long slender body to kiss him, the perfume it gave out turned his little head giddy. She taught him a trick of which his mother disapproved, fluttering her long eyelashes against his cheeks in what she called a butterfly's kiss. He held up his face for it and closed his eyes. "Look, Emily," Fanny's light voice cried. "Look at your son. The flirt he is! At five. Pity poor women when he's twenty-five." His heart, the sycophantic heart of a little boy, swelled with pride when she came down to visit him at his preparatory school. He was not entirely despicable; her beauty and her silk dresses ravished him even more than they did the other little boys. But he liked to walk behind her into a restaurant, to rejoice in her superb indifference to glances and turned heads, and to feel himself a sharer in the impressive attentions of the waiters. During his last term at the preparatory school she fell ill of an obscure spinal disease. His mother came down to the

school to tell Nat, but an officious dayboy had already seen in a newspaper a paragraph headed: *Tragedy of Famous Beauty*, and brought the paper to show him. He handed it back without speaking. When Emily came he first shocked her by laughing heartily and then alarmed her with an outburst of frantic grief. He clung to her sobbing, begging her not to go away. As Emily soothed him she stifled a pang of jealousy. Would he be so upset if it were my illness? she thought. But Nat's tears were chiefly to her account, though neither of them knew it. If beauty could be brutally crushed out, why not goodness and love? He recovered rapidly, and when Emily went away, a forlorn and shabby figure, she left Nat pursing his small mouth in a smile of pure mischief. She had given him her last half-crown. With imper-
turbable dignity and a ha'penny in her purse she faced ten hours' railway journey.

Fanny got so far better that she could sometimes sit through a dinner or a play. The rest of her life was spent in bed. She grew very thin. Her beauty changed, without spoiling, but her temper spoiled completely. She had fits of ungovernable rage, in which no one but Daniel could soothe her. Her illness had had a curious effect on his feeling for her. So long as she was a reigning beauty, he had regarded her with a feeling very like Nat's, except that his was grimly possessive. When he took her to dine out, he liked to think, and to remind her, by a glance or a word, that her beautiful shoulders were his, to caress. But when she fell ill, he suffered a violent change. All that was kind in him, and gentle, and generous, concentrated itself on her. To make up for it, he became the most unyielding of employers. Outside her room, the lover became a bigot and a screw-fisted reactionary. Because of Fanny, his workmen were driven harder for lower wages than at any other works and the hardy young Jew in charge of the research department often found himself unable to extract a farthing for its most urgent needs. Fanny

got everything of Daniel's, his complete stock of kindness, wisdom, and justice, together with his strength, his capacity for passion and his heart. He had been savagely faithful to her from the day when he could no longer possess her.

He watched her anxiously as she offered her cheek to Nat.

"Your aunt is tired," he said curtly. "You'd better come home with us to supper, boy."

Nat said: "Thank you, sir." He squeezed his father's hand. James returned the pressure absently.

"I saw you admired our only female comedian."

Nat blushed. "She's splendid," he murmured.

"If this were France she would be decorated," James said.

Daniel handed Fanny into the car. "In this country no such premium is put upon coarseness and immorality," he said coldly.

Fanny laughed. "I'm ashamed of my nephew. He's fallen in love with the vulgar wretch. Look at him! Nat, have you forgotten how I used to tickle your cheeks with my eyelashes? You're too old for me to do it now, but if you go about looking like that, some woman will have you snaffled before you know what's happened to you."

Nat smiled at her. He trembled. Denny's cheek was soft, like a flower. He groaned inwardly over the poverty of the phrase, but could not think of a better, and he was further revolted by the comparison with a young bird's down that occurred to him when he was seated before cold pigeon pie in his aunt's room. His heart ached with Denny's young loveliness and his mind with the songs that poets had made in praise of their loves, yet nothing but these commonplace and shocking ideas visited him. He felt much too earthy for Denny. He began to appreciate why knights fasted before the Grail. Ought he to refuse food? What a thought! He allowed himself to be served with pigeon pie and saw with pleasure that a bottle of his uncle's burgundy was coming his way . . . "Nat's too young to drink wine." . . . "Non-

sense, Fanny, let the boy have his glass." . . . His aunt twinkled her blue eyes at him. "Nat darling, has any wretch of a woman told you yet that you dimple when you smile?" . . . Years later, the evening and the room became for Nat the very shrine and bright memory of a lost world. He saw it in his memory much as now, looking into the depths of the table and seeing there reflected, like a room under an enchantment, the old silver, the fine glass, roses, and the smooth flames of the candles burning point-downward and motionless. He saw himself seated at the table, warm and very happy, listening respectfully to the careful voices of his elders, glancing now and then at the face of his aunt Fanny, withdrawn into the shadow, and at her hands, not hers, but the folded exquisite hands of all lovely useless women. If his memory served him well, he saw his own face reflected from the pool of the table, a boy's smooth face with smiling mouth and eyes veiled by their lashes. By looking hard he could even see the dream behind the boy's eyes: his bones turned to water and he trembled with pity and longing. If only for one moment he could re-enter the boy's spirit, troubled by nothing less enchanting than his first love . . . oh, happy boy.

His uncle was talking of the strike threatened at his works. "If I had my way," he said, "I'd hang the ringleaders, not for mere agitation but for treason and blasphemy."

"Only for treason and blasphemy?" James asked.

Daniel had ready a speech on duty and social morality but the question put him off. He said hurriedly: "The country is in a bad way, it has never been the same since the Boer War." He had lately taken office as an under-secretary at the Board of Trade.

James said mildly: "I suppose we must expect that. You remind me—I don't know why you should, but you do—of Pelissier singing a song about King Edward. *As long as we've a king*

like Good King Edward, There'll be no wa-a-ar, For he 'ates that sort of thing."

"It's impossible to persuade you that anything is serious," Daniel said bitterly. "Even an attack on justice and society. Is there anything you believe in? Do you believe in decency and order?"

"Oh certainly," James said gently. He could never be civil enough to another person's faith. He spent most of his life dealing with people actuated by treachery, greed, fear or hatred, and he knew that these are the emotions that actuate most people. But he never failed to treat all men as if they were perfectly sincere and honest-meaning.

Nat's heart warmed to his father. What a humbug Daniel was. He shut his eyes to enjoy the sensations of his second glass of burgundy. His head felt pleasantly light. When he opened them, his father was smiling at him across the table. "The boy's going to sleep," Fanny said. Nat shook his head, smiling. He had never been happier or more alive. His body tingled with life and ease. He knew he ought to go. He got up and kissed his aunt and adroitly avoided shaking hands with Daniel, who was now bent over his wife, drawing her cloak up to her neck. He was really drawing himself and his strength round her, covering her up from weariness and from Nat's too bright eyes. To annoy Daniel, Nat kissed his aunt again, slow mischievous smiling kisses. He slipped his arm in his father's and drew him as far as the hall. He had an absurd feeling that he was leaving James in the house of an enemy and he tried to think of something to say, to make James understand that he could count on his son. All he said was: "It's a jolly night, sir." Turning round, after crossing the street, he saw his father still there in the doorway, a thin little man, very straight. He waved both arms and shouted: "Lovely night, lovely sky." His father made him a polite little bow. "Another *Oh certainly!*" Nat thought. "He

never snubs anyone, not even a young ass like me. *I am* an ass, to wave my arms and shout. What a night! Oh Denny."

Arrived at Queen Street, he remembered that he had no latchkey. He rang and when Mrs. Clemens opened the door said nervously, "I've been dining out. I didn't know it was so late."

"Late's as you look at it," Mrs. Clemens answered cryptically. "Some's too early whenever they come. You'll want breakfast about nine, sir?"

"If that's a convenient hour."

"Mr. Savill usually breakfasts at nine."

"I'll do the same then," Nat murmured. "Good-night. Thank you so much for sitting up for me." . . . His little room felt cool when he entered it, filled with an indefinable fresh scent, the country entering the town under cover of night. He undressed, and getting into bed, summoned Denny to kiss him again. "I shall see you tomorrow," he whispered. "My little love, my dear one," and fell asleep, smiling . . .

In the morning he went off to see Denny. The address he had was that of a house in a back street between Brixton and Herne Hill, and when he found it he was divided between delight, and anger that she should be living in this sordid yellow place. Standing on the top of the cracked steps he thought he saw her in a room to the left of the door, but a sad little girl opened the door and took him into an empty room at the back of the house.

He waited for twenty minutes, sick with impatience. She came at last, pale, and so stately that his courage dropped. He took her hand, as grave as herself.

"Did you get my letter?"

"Yes."

Denny sat down. Nat waited for her to say more, but she was obstinate. He felt wretched, and the effort he used to keep his voice steady made it sound indifferent. He asked after her father.

"He's in bed," Denny answered. "I think he's better. He doesn't cough." She arranged her hands on the arms of her chair.

Nat thought grimly that if Sadgrove were not, after all, to be his father-in-law, he might go on coughing his worst. He had not the least idea how haggard his young face had become. Denny glanced at it and was pleasurable moved. Luckily for Emily Grimshaw, she could not see it. The silence persisted until Emily's son determined that this state of affairs could not go on.

"What is the matter?" he asked hardly. "Are you angry with me?"

Denny moved her sleek head. "If I were I'd have reason."

"And what do you mean by that?"

"You had no right to suppose I must be longing to see you, just because—" Denny hesitated.

"Because you asked me to kiss you," Nat said unpleasantly. His hurt was making him savage: he was anxious to humiliate her. Denny dropped her head until he could hardly see her pretty mouth. What he could see of it was disdainful and quite suddenly Nat found the whole affair supremely funny. He flung up his head and laughed. He laughed so long that Denny lost confidence.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Don't laugh. I don't like it."

Nat stopped on the edge of complete breakdown and knelt beside her chair.

"Denny dear, forgive me. Dear, dear Denny, do forgive me. I adore you. You're so sweet. It seemed silly to be quarrelling. You do want me to stay, don't you?"

He pleaded with his slight body, pressed tautly against the arm of her chair, and his smooth young voice, softened by a lingering quaver of mischief. His eyes were kind, masterful and smiling. He felt masterful, and very strong and happy. Denny could

plunge him into anguish by withholding herself, but he was not afraid of anguish. He was not afraid now of anything, unless of missing a moment because the next followed too close. He began talking in her ear. He knew he was talking nonsense, but he had to talk, or else laugh or cry or sing.

“You’ll like Saints Rew, my sweet, the country is so friendly and English. You couldn’t think of lovelier names. Listen to them—Tytherley and Mottisfont and Wellow—you couldn’t have anything more like England, could you? I’ll show you all of them. Can you walk as far as that on your little feet? So dear you are. *Fair and fair and twice as fair. Love, love.*”

Denny understood him when he talked about love and her feet, but Tytherley and Mottisfont and Wellow were not on any map of hers, any more than Tempe or the old garden of the sun. She did not understand that Nat was making her a present of his nineteen years, with a corner of the Hampshire downs, a valley asleep, some few green rounded hills, rain in beech trees, the feet of the wind on the turf, faded amber velvet in his mother’s room, and a great glass globe flawed with light.

“You are rather nice, Nat. It’s a pity you’re so—thoughtless.”

“I love you.”

“Do you know I’m older than you are? You’re only nineteen. I’m twenty-three.”

“You’re lovely.”

Denny did not answer for a moment.

“I wanted you to say that,” she cried suddenly, and bent to kiss him. They clung together for an unregarded time and when they drew apart Nat hung back from her with closed eyes. He had turned faint when she first came in to his arms, and now held himself as still as a man who does not know how badly he has been hurt.

“You must go,” Denny whispered.

“I can’t. Not yet.”

"I have to read to my father."

"Let him wait," Nat said half-audibly. He pressed her head against his shoulder and stroked it. "Aren't you happy here?"

Denny braced herself against him. "You hold me as if you thought I'd break," she said, half in discontent and half in need of assurance.

The boy held her a little tighter and covered her face with light kisses. "You're such—a—a delicate little thing," he murmured. "I don't want to hurt you." His head was beginning to clear. "I'll love you and take care of you all my life."

"How do you know it will last so long?" Denny said lightly. "We're both very young."

It surprised Nat that she could think of such things to say when he had to leave her in a few moments' time. With something like dismay he wondered whether he could ever become as self-possessed and experienced. But when she stood up and smoothing back her hair offered him a soft flushed cheek, he felt a thrill that ran down him from his lips to his feet. It made him gasp and smile.

"I must go," Denny said, "if you won't."

"When can I come back?"

"Come tomorrow afternoon. Can you?"

Nat stood stock still, so she went away and left him, pausing to blow back a kiss from her finger-tips. A moment later the sad little girl, now thoughtfully polishing the handle of the front door, was startled by the visitor's rapid emergence. He pressed a shilling into her small bony hand and plunged into the street . . .

The Duchess came home the same day. Nat was enormously pleased to see him. "Upon my soul," he said absurdly, "you do look handsome. I feel like a puppy with a kind master. You reek of the elegant circles you move in."

"You're nearly as helpless as a puppy," George retorted.

"Why didn't you make Mrs. Clemens give you my bed? You can't afford to live here. I'm going to have them put up a bed for you in my little dressing room. You're my guest of course." His mouth drew down into an obstinate line. It bored him to be opposed. Nat gave in, and found himself telling George about Denny. He had not meant to talk of her, but George's superior knowledge and assurance were having a familiar effect on him. George listened sympathetically until a chance phrase startled him. "But you're not going to marry her?" he exclaimed.

Nat's eyebrows shot up. A sensation of anger, entirely unexpected, took his breath away.

"Not now, I mean," George added.

Had he meant that, or was he being unwarrantably impudent? Nat's instant of hesitation aged him. "Of course not now," he said haughtily. "I'll be up another two years, probably three or four." His tone was meant to warn George not to interfere in an affair that did not concern him.

"I knew a fellow who married when he was still up at Oxford," George said dreamily. "He did it to annoy his aunt, but it absolutely wiped his eye for him. He used to hang about looking dusty. Nobody quite liked to speak to him in case he was thinking of his responsibilities."

Nat laughed. The chasm that had opened between himself and his boyhood and himself and George closed over. "I can't afford to marry for years and years," he said cheerfully. He yawned, stretching his slender body. His hair was ruffled. He smiled mysteriously to himself.

"When you do you'll probably be unhappy," George remarked gloomily. "Most marriages are. I shan't marry until I'm fifty and past work. I suppose you know what happened to my father. He ran off with his chief's wife and the stiff devil wouldn't divorce her. It ruined my father at the time. He'd have been Foreign Secretary now but for that. They were together for

fifteen years; when she died he married, and had me. I trust I am a consolation to him."

"Do you suppose it was worth it?" Nat said idly, very little curious about an old story that had nothing to do with life, Denny, the Duchess, himself.

"No. He regretted it a good many years before she died. He told me so. I shan't make a mistake like that, my dear. I've never yet seen a woman I'd ruin myself to have."

Nat shut his eyes. He tried not to think of Denny. Since he had torn himself, with something too like anguish to be known from it, out of the Brixton house, he had not cared to examine his thoughts of her. When he glanced up George was looking at him with an odd derisive air. Nat's eyes smiled back at him.

"What's the matter, Duchess? . . . I'm not thinking of my responsibilities, I assure you."

"Don't expect too much sympathy," George murmured. "I'm in love with you myself." For a moment his eyes, composed and mocking, held Nat's. Both young men laughed heartily, and George rang to order tea. He was dining out, and when he went away to dress Nat leaned back in his chair, and gave himself up at last to Denny. He had her so safely now that he could call her to him again. When he shut his eyes he held her in his arms; the memory thrilled him more sharply than the actual touch had done. A shocking ecstasy passed up him, leaving him relaxed and trembling. He began to recall details, the clearness of her face and eyes, her thick arched eyebrows. He was not confused by his new state of engaged young man, but he was by his own emotions, running a course between humility and the piercing height of triumph. Her name began to beat in him like a second heart: it took an effort to stop it at his lips.

George looked in on his way out. He was bored and tried to persuade Nat to come with him.

"I don't break into people's houses without an invitation."

"But it's that sort of house."

"Then I would rather not," Nat said. "Besides, I'm too shabby."

"No one will notice your trousers if you smile your—seductive smile."

Nat shook his head, laughing. He preferred to go on dreaming in the darkening room, shut away from the streets, the sounds, and scents, that last night had woven themselves into so strange and maddening a rhythm, the very rhythm of life, rich and mysterious. It unwound itself endlessly outside the house, breaking and scattering in little showers and dying falls, a hurdy-gurdy in the road, a girl's voice. Last night bewildered, excited by it, tonight he knew its lovely secret. He felt warm and contented.

George's face wore the look of twinkling mockery Nat knew so well. "I shan't go. You're quite right. It's a revolting way to spend an evening. We'll go out together instead."

With a faint sense of shock, like a person suddenly wakened, Nat listened to his careless excuses on the telephone. His feeling for George was extraordinarily warm and comforting, an affection without sex but certainly not without passion, only possible between two minds in sympathy. He knew (or would have known, had he ever thought about it) that George's was the dominant mind in their friendship, and it did not occur to him that this might be so because his own was still in the puppy stage, an engaging compound of vivid impulses, curiosity, and rather childish perplexities. He was young for his age and George was old for his, and between them they made a whole of which the rightness had never been seriously challenged . . . Nat smiled involuntarily. He was not sentimental about George, for all that he was outrageously fond of him and took for granted his superiority in most things. He was aware, for instance, that though it looked as if George had given up a dinner party out

of sheer friendliness, he had not really done anything of the kind. It was useless to pretend that the Duchess ever gave up anything. He did what he liked. "Let's go now," George said, "and persuade your young woman to come out to dinner with us."

All the way to Brixton in the cab, Nat nursed his thin knees. The light of passing lamps fell across his face, shadowing its indeterminate curves. He looked very young and engaging; his mouth made a blurred soft line, his arched brows another.

"Don't you wish you need never grow old?" George said suddenly. "I hate the thought of it. I shall wake up one morning and hear my joints crack. Disgusting!"

Nat let himself sway to the jolting of the cab. His body ached with life: it welled from invisible pricking springs and poured through him inexhaustibly. He felt immortal, as if he were the only young man now alive who never would grow old. Eternity smelled of stables and old leather, and when they were in the glare of Brixton Road, he pulled himself together and leaned out of the window, shouting directions. Outside the house, he left George in the cab and ran up the steps.

Denny opened the door, and in the dark little passage she flung herself into his arms. Her warmth and softness poured over him, over all his limbs. Nat gave himself up to her. He had no longer a separate being. He was disembodied, his life left him and clung at her lips; when he released her he had forgotten what it was he had come to say, and had to lean his head on her shoulder for a moment.

"I can't go on holding you up," Denny whispered.

"Oh, I beg your pardon. Am I boring you?" Nat let her go again and told her why he had come. Denny made difficulties. "Run away and dress," he said urgently, and when she turned to go speeded her on her way with a mischievous pat.

"Your manners are dreadful," Denny said resentfully.

"I'm sorry. Hurry. Darling. I'm hungry." What was the matter with her?

The evening was not a success. Denny gave George her whole attention, except when she consented to dance. Nat danced as he walked, with a nervous grace. He was disconcerted to find that she danced very badly, jerking her slender body clumsily in his arms. He could not go on and they gave it up. "You don't like dancing," he said humbly.

"Intelligent beings rarely do," Denny answered haughtily. She looked prettier than ever as she sat down, blushing faintly and anxious about her shining-smooth hair.

"It is a waste of time," Nat murmured. He began to think of his wasted youth, and then rather pitifully of Denny, whose life had perhaps not encouraged dancing. He wanted very much to say something to put her at her ease, and he gave her a quick adoring smile, to go on with. She hardly looked at him. Encouraged by George, she was making witty and malicious comments on the dancers. The two grew so friendly that Nat left them alone. He leaned back in his chair and stared round the room. It overlooked the embankment and the river, and between the moving bodies of the dancers he could see the leaves of the trees outside the windows, colourless in the light pouring from the room. They moved and swayed: inside the dancers moved and swayed in a deliberate pattern, shot with light thrown back from the mirrors. The warm room throbbed to one pulse, inexorable, issuing from the violins in the corner. Nat was thrilled against his will by the extravagant richness of the place. He tried to feel used to the scene and to Denny, but with no effect. He felt very inexperienced, and longed for Saints Rew and the lime-burdened night . . . "You can kiss me if you like." His heart leaped . . . She was sitting with her little chin in her hands, gazing at George, and the boy wished ridiculously that she would stop talking long enough to let him get her face by

heart. Afterwards he could only remember two things that she had said, neither of them at all witty.

“ . . . I was going to marry a friend of my father.”

He lifted shocked eyebrows at this, and catching the Duchess's eye, bit back an exclamation.

“He was quite old,” Denny explained. “Forty-five and very jealous. We were walking along the towing-path from Kew when a man spoke to me and John threw him into the river.”

Nat thought it a remarkably silly incident, and wished that she had kept quiet about it. “I should never have the simple courage to push an admirer of yours into the river,” he observed blandly, and for the rest of the evening said nothing.

George handed Denny into a cab and stood with his handsome face poked through the window to say Good-night. “Aren't you coming?” she asked. George smiled. His eyes twinkled. “And the river so near,” he murmured, and stood back for Nat to get in. Nat sat there stiffly. He was furiously angry, with Denny, with George for laughing at her, with himself for having been unable to control the situation. But when he stood outside the door of the shabby house he was only wretched. “You do—want me, Denny?”

“Yes. Don't kiss me. The man's looking. Won't you come in?”

Nat shook his head.

“I shan't ask you again.”

“Oh, my *dear*,” Nat whispered. “I'll see you tomorrow.” He stood beside her while she opened the door, turned, and ran quickly down the steps. Impossible to explain that he was too sore and disturbed, that he could not give himself away again yet. He wanted to be alone. In the cab he was alone, cut off completely from the current of life. He sat with his head in his hands, thinking not of Denny, but of Saints Rew. The house had had so much of his that it was just it should have this. He

laid his perplexity down beside the red jacket and all the other things . . .

When he reached her house again in the middle of the next afternoon the blinds were all down. He thought nothing of it and waited in the darkened room until Denny came in and wept in his arms. Then he realised that Sadgrove had coughed himself out at last. He stood holding Denny until his arms ached with the effort and his body with useless compassion. "Don't cry, don't cry," he repeated. He put her into a chair and knelt beside it, stroking her hair. She had half turned away from him, and he began to stroke her throat and her arms; a sudden painful emotion made him hide his face against her, longing to feel her hands on him. But Denny having other things to think about . . . sat up and smoothed her hair.

"What shall I do now?" Her voice had a dry sound.

Nat frowned. "My mother will help us," he suggested. "When I tell her."

"I don't want that kind of help," Denny said briefly. "I have a sister, you know. She's coming from Scotland. I wired for her." She explained that her sister was the wife of an Episcopalian bishop, and in a sudden impatience pushed Nat away. "I don't want to live in Scotland," she cried. "I shall be bored to death."

"Would you like living at Saints Rew?"

"The country always bores me. Any country."

Nat looked almost old. "You'll write to me every day, Denny?"

"What use is that? You'll be in Oxford, enjoying yourself. I can't spend the rest of my life waiting for your letters."

"Little love," he pleaded against her bitterness, "you won't have to. I'll get my degree and we'll be married. I shall make a good husband. Very steady and affectionate."

Denny's face wore an expression with which he was becom-

ing familiar. "That's nearly three years away. I shall be twenty-six," she said coldly.

He did not know what to say to her. He felt very young and foolish and inadequate. "I'll see you often," he said desperately. "I must. I'll come to Scotland at the end of every term." Poor Emily. "The day I know I've passed I'll get a decent job and take you away with me."

Denny's eyes slid over his face. "Must we wait all that time?"

Nat stood up. "I couldn't marry you now." He was curiously ashamed, and his voice sounded cold to his own ears. "I have no money. We're revoltingly poor."

"But you'll have that house? Some day. Won't you? It must be worth a lot of money, I should think."

Nat was silent for so long that she grew restless and tired of watching him. "Come here, Nat." He obeyed, stiffly. "No, kneel down. I want to talk to you." He shut his eyes, yielding to the delight of Denny's fingers in his hair, on his eyelids. For the first time since he had known and loved her, he was thinking of marriage. He had not thought of it before, nor imagined Denny as a wife, his wife. I shall have you, he thought, startled by a brief shock of pleasure; his boy's mouth felt for Denny's and stayed on it. After a time he began to comfort her again, not sure now whether he was consoling her because her father was dead or because she was going into exile. Silently, he gave her his life, his youth, George, Oxford . . .

She had told him not to come again until she sent for him. He went to South Kensington and worked hard, glad to have the cold shapes of facts about him, to let his mind bite into them. It was nearly a week, during which he had kept her out of his thoughts all day to let her take possession of him every night, before she sent. He reached her in a mood that her un-

familiar black failed to subdue, and for a few moments she allowed him to kiss and tease her until between love and mischief his head swam. "I'm going away next month," she said. It sobered him.

"I'll come and see you."

"You can't. Judith wouldn't like it."

"Is Judith your sister?"

"Of course. She wants me to marry John Clifford, the man I was going to marry before. He has a shooting lodge up there . . . Don't look like that, Nat. I told you."

"I know you did." Nat frowned. "Will she give you a rotten time about it?"

Denny nodded. Nat seized her fiercely. "My darling. I can't bear that. The—the *sow*. I'll speak to her. Where is she?"

"You can't do that," Denny said quietly. "She would take it out of me after you'd gone. I've got to live with her, you know. For three years. If I can stand it so long."

Nat felt himself suffocating with rage and anxiety. "What on earth do you mean?" he demanded hardly. "You're not going to marry an old man because you can't wait three years for me." His heart misgave him. "Don't be hurt, my little love," he cried. "Don't, don't. I can't bear it."

"It's I who have to bear it," Denny said in her composed voice. "Three years of living on sufferance in someone else's house. Judith doesn't want me—and John does."

"Denny, Denny, think what you're saying."

Denny flung herself into his arms, straining against his slender body. "Why shouldn't we be married before I go?" she whispered. "Quietly. Not telling anyone. We should be safe then. Nat, think. This is the first thing I've ever asked you to do for me." She took his face between her hands and laid her own on it. The boy stood unresponsive, submitting. Denny drew back. "If you don't—like it," she began.

"I'm thinking," Nat said quietly.

Denny laughed. "So I need thinking over? Thank you."

"Don't." Nat smiled at her lovingly. "I daresay I'm a fool. But . . . I loathe private things. I prefer telling people to look and be damned. You'd have to let me warn my mother."

"Do you run to your mother with everything?" Denny saw Nat stiffen and knew that she had made a mistake. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. But darling Nat, don't you see? If we tell them, your mother, Judith, they'll stop us. They'll say you're too young. Are you too young? Perhaps you are. Perhaps I'd better marry John Clifford and be safe."

"Hush," Nat said gravely. "Don't you feel safe with me?"

"Not up there. Not for three years."

Nat bit his lips. He felt a fool, and ashamed that he had remembered George and the married undergraduate whose responsibilities so weighed on him. Emily's face came between him and Denny, and for a moment her eyes—she had the eyes of a sad baby in her wrinkled humorous face—looked directly at her son. She would be horribly hurt by a secret marriage . . . Emily's son rejected as unsuitable the idea of pleading for her with the girl who had everything Emily had already lost, youth, beauty, hope. He lifted his head and looked at Denny. She was standing wistfully in the middle of the room. He could not bear it. She was right. He would never be allowed to marry her now if they knew. He opened his arms. "Did you think I was going to fail you?" he said sweetly. "Come."

"You should come to me."

Nat held his head high and smiled. "Come."

She came, and he kissed her recklessly. "What does a license cost? George will know. Darling, what fun!"

In her relief—she had not been so near losing him as she

supposed—Denny was very gentle and affectionate. She would not go out with him, but she laughed at his bad jokes and stroked his face. He held and kissed each finger in turn.

Back in Queen Street, he realised that he was exhausted. He dropped into a chair, and when George came in he had fallen asleep, and lay like a baby with hands curled up and dark hair falling over his face. George woke him gently. He sat up and asked at once: "Is that you, Duchess? What does it cost to get married quickly?"

"Good God," George said. "It's the *kinchin lay*. I won't be a witness." . . .

He married her—Nathaniel Gower Grimshaw, bachelor of no occupation, and Dennison Sadgrove, spinster (no other occupation)—in the registrar's office at Camberwell, on the afternoon of the day she was leaving for Scotland. When the indifferent ceremony was over he proposed, standing beside her in the chill dusty entrance hall, to tell her sister now. Denny refused resolutely.

"I shall not tell her I'm married. A married girl is left out of everything. Judith wouldn't bother with me, I should never go anywhere."

Nat pressed his mouth into a pallid line. Nothing she had ever said had hurt him more. Glancing at him, Denny murmured: "After all I have married you. You ought to be pleased."

Did she feel that she had conferred an enormous favour? He was ashamed of his thoughts . . . Then Denny began a coaxing speech. "You can't scold me now; in a few hours I shall be in the train." Nat turned to her in agony and hurried her into a cab. He held her in his arms through the short drive, hardly able to speak. It was Denny who remembered to stop the cab before it reached the house. "Don't get out,"

she whispered. "I can kiss you once more if you stay in." She leaned over the door. "Goodbye."

"Goodbye. My dear, my life."

The cab moved off. Nat craned out of the window for a last sight of his wife.

CHAPTER IV

NAT's cab had rolled over Westminster Bridge before he remembered that cabs were not for the likes of him. He stopped it, and walked across the Green Park to see his aunt. Daniel Grimshaw lived in a thin house in St. James's Place overlooking the Queen's Walk, within two minutes' walk of his boot-maker, his hatter, and his umbrella shop, all in St. James's Street. He lunched and dined at the club, except when he telephoned Fanny that he would dine with her in her room. Then began the comedy that was in progress when Nat arrived. Fanny telephoned her housekeeper to order a very small cutlet. Five minutes later she telephoned to ask if it had come. Another five minutes and she was telephoning the butcher. At the end of half an hour, Nat, who had been stationed at a landing window, announced that a small pink cutlet was being lifted from a van and carried down the area steps. Fanny fell back among her pillows and allowed Nat to restore her. "Did it look young?" she asked.

"Infantile," Nat assured her. "Like a baby's thigh."

The door opened just as Fanny screamed, and there was Emily, in an absurd hat with two large flowers bolt upright on the crown. Nat's face of solemn mischief changed. He felt uncomfortable as he kissed her. "What are you doing here, mother? Why didn't you tell me to meet you?"

"I sent a telegram to Queen Street," his mother said.

Nat grew hot. "I've been out all day," he muttered. What would she do if he said: "I've been getting married?" Faint?

Scream? Fanny would do that. He was relieved to see that his mother had turned her attention to soothing her sister-in-law. When that was over, Emily took off her dreadful hat and laid it on the table, where its flowers went on quivering for a long time.

“Darling, you never come to see me,” Fanny wailed. “I feel so much better when you are here. Couldn’t you come to live in town, and look after your son? He needs it. He all but ran away with a fat vulgar singer the other night. If we hadn’t happened to be there—”

“I came up because of Nat,” Emily said quietly. Nat’s heart stood still. “His father said—there might be war.” If that were all! Nat welcomed war, pestilence, flood, any act of God but discovery.

“Haven’t you been reading the papers?” his mother demanded. “Didn’t you read the other day that an Austrian archduke, awfully arrayed, had been shot by the Servians? Your father said this morning it was war. I don’t know why it should be—there wouldn’t be a war if I got myself shot to pieces—and he probably deserved it. They all do. Can you give me a bed for a few days, Fanny?”

“No one ever tells me anything,” Fanny complained. “Daniel must have known all about it. He calls Mr. Balfour ‘Arthur,’ which would have horrified the Queen—you can’t expect the masses to respect a man who lets Daniel, of all people, call him ‘Arthur’—but he doesn’t tell me anything he hears.” That this was a shameless lie her hearers knew and she knew they knew.

“James,” Emily purred, “does not call people by their Christian names. But he has letters from four kings, two emperors, and heaven knows how many ambassadors and queens beginning *Dear Friend*.”

Nat frowned. Since George went away, a week earlier, to

avoid (they both knew it) Nat's marriage, he had seen and heard nothing that had not to do with Denny. He thought that his mother had not improbably got the whole thing wrong, but a vague excitement drove him out to call for his father at the temporary home of the International Intelligence, in a wing of the War Office, a juxtaposition of brains and brawn that was profoundly uncomfortable for both.

His father was trying to type a letter. He typed with one finger, frowning with the effort, his tongue between his teeth. He twinkled up at his son. "Miss Smith is away," he said gravely. "I can't do anything without her. In fact, if she doesn't come back, they will have to call their war off."

"You've got heaps of clerks," Nat pointed out.

"But only one Miss Smith," James murmured.

He had dropped ten years off his age since Nat saw him last, a year for every day during which he had seen, one after another, his efforts fail. When his last weapons failed him and war came, he would be more helpless and younger than Nat, who had still his immature body to oppose to torture and death.

"My mother has come up to stay with Aunt Fanny."

"You'd better stick to me," James said. "I'm sleeping at the club. You can be useful. Do you type?"

The illness of Miss Smith deprived that grim young woman of the chance, which she would certainly have taken, to draw up a time-table of Armageddon. Nat was far less painstaking. He forgot to write down the stages as his father drew his attention to them. Afterwards he remembered the last fortnight of July, which had begun with his marriage, only as a confused prelude to adventure. Blindness, anger, impudence, *hubris*, strange sounds without, all the proper accompaniments of tragedy were there. He remembered no tragic figures, unless he counted the general he one morning came upon, weeping in

the corner of a War Office corridor because he was afraid there would be no war after all. The general glared at him out of one furious embarrassed eye as he hurried past.

James kept nothing back from him now. Nat knew, when Poincaré paid his visit to St. Petersburg, that the Frenchman was promising his country's support to Russia. He read the letter from the Austrian ambassador there to his father, complaining that M. Poincaré had treated him "as if our countries were already at war." He knew that this promise was the second blank cheque of the crisis and that the first had been handed to Austria by the German foreign office on the sixth of July. He knew that Russia had begun her preparation for war on the day after Austria sent off her long-delayed ultimatum to the guilty Servians. He knew that the Servians began to mobilise three hours before sending their reply, and the hour, the same day, when the Austrian troops turned to the frontier. One evening, when he was sitting in Queen Street, trying to work (Denny had written to him pathetically that she was lonely and hoped he was working hard for their future), his father brought in two Germans, who were not introduced to him. His father said: "My son, Nat." Nat stood up, laying a book over the photograph of Denny on his table. The Germans bowed civilly and took no other notice of him. They were both little men, like his father, and seemed tired. Nat's German was not good, but he gathered that both men came from the German court and that they were begging their old good kind friend to carry suggestions for peace to Sir Edward Grey. James dropped into English. "It is useless. I will try. The Foreign Secretary is a hardened sentimentalist; no other class of men has made more involuntary mischief in the world." The elder German sighed. "His opposite numbers are with us."

"When it is finished," said James, "and the histories are

written, there will be a good many names, yours and mine among them. It will be said: *These* wanted war and *these* tried to avert it. But the truth is, my dear, that none of the names are of the least importance, and all the histories made up of names are fustian, except, perhaps, those on memorial stones. Even to say, as some will say, that you and I, and a man in Paris and a man in St. Petersburg and a man in Vienna, were straws blown in the front of a monstrous wind, is fustian. None of these men or straws want war. They want victory—which is a spirit. Suppose it were said to them: You can have victory at this price, one young man, one only, to be chosen and shot to pieces before you all, his jaw blown off and his entrails gushing out on the ground, which of these would dare accept? But because it is a million of young men to die and suffer more than Christ did——”

“I think”—he twinkled at them—“that all biographies of the great men of this period will be fustian, even that of my friend M. Poincaré, and that the only acts of his life for which even he can claim to have been responsible are that he ate, drank, and relieved his body. He won’t be able to claim credit for his dying, any more than if he were a conscript. I shall take care not to leave any memoirs.”

The thought crossed Nat’s mind that his father was in a position of extraordinary delicacy and danger, talking to these men. He was glad when the two of them bowed themselves out, without looking at him. For a long time afterwards, the three weary little men, his father and the two old Germans, who talked without looking at him, remained in his mind as significant—but he was not sure of what. Later still, their meeting in his room lost any meaning for him, and became as incredible, as irrecoverable and faint, as all his life before 1914.

After that night, the confused sounds in Europe rose to

their climax too quickly for Nat. Miss Smith came back, to conduct the crisis, but Nat stayed on. One night he fell asleep over the typewriter in his father's room. He woke suddenly to find his father beside him, with tears running down his face. "I can't lift you," James said. "I'm only a very little man." Nat staggered up and dropped on to the couch, where he fell asleep again. In the morning he was quite sure that it had been a dream.

Troops moved about the hot dusty roads of Europe, in Germany, in Russia, in France, in Servia, in Austria. One night the English fleet received an order to mobilise. Two days after that his father took him over to Paris, where the Russian ambassador kissed James on both cheeks. "Congratulate me," he cried, "*c'est ma guerre.*"

"You can have it," James retorted, like a schoolboy.

His father's gaiety during these days was a perpetual delight to Nat. James had rediscovered most of his youthful gestures. At the moment when youth was due to go into exile he was offering a proof of its immortality in his own body. He seemed able to do without sleep. He sorted out letters, telegrams, conferences, and ultimatums for the benefit of harassed ministers, putting them in their right order of time, so that no one should have any excuse for missing the train to Central Europe to see the opening of the final ballet. At the last moment, when it was certain that England would be at war in a few hours, he began to get together information on the guns and shells available for the army. A minister on whom he called was in Scotland at an archery meeting. James left a note asking for the latest returns of the army's bow and arrow equipment, for his files. The next day he was dismissed, not for that youthful insolence, but because of a sudden press outcry against his German friendships. He had been in office just over two years, after an apprenticeship that had lasted thirty-eight.

One newspaper recalled that his department had been regarded as the brain of the Cabinet. With characteristic phlegm it added: "If brains should prove to be necessary at such a time there are plenty of honest English minds and hearts at the service of their country." It was as if the affection felt for James by the handful of people who had seen through his devastating shyness could never spread any farther. There was no echo of it among the common people of England, who can love fools, clowns, knaves, saints, soldiers, princes, but have never yet been known to like and trust any man of whom they knew only that he was just and intelligent. Concerning James they may have felt, in that inability of his to be deluded by words and shows, some spirit alien to their own. He was not one of them. They looked for a man like themselves, obtuse, slow, baffled, brave sometimes and frightened oftener. Such a man they could love and follow. But not James. They did not understand him, and felt dimly that he was altogether too intelligent. The Prime Minister, whose old friend and faithful *aide* he had been, apologised uncomfortably to his fallen colleague. He explained that nothing must be allowed to shake the confidence of the people in their leaders. "I heartily approve of the custom of sacrificing before a victory," James answered pleasantly. "There is something in being the first to go." When he left the building for the last time, he passed Daniel, in earnest conversation with his successor, and stopped to beg him to employ Miss Smith, because she was competent and needed work. Then he went home to his Emily, very tired.

Nat enlisted in the O.U.O.T.C. the same day. He was given ten days' leave before presenting himself, and he wrote to Denny asking her to let him tell his mother that he was married. It was a grave boyish letter and drew an angry reply. Denny was bored, she kept him to his promise, and she was bored. He put the letter in his pocket and went off to see his

aunt. When he was leaving Fanny said mysteriously: "Put your hand under my pillow, Nat." He felt about, and found a scented handkerchief, a letter, a rag doll, and two five-pound notes. She pushed the notes into his pocket. "For you, Nat. Don't tell your uncle. He hates me to give you things." He bent down to kiss her, and she clasped both hands and the rag doll round his neck. He felt her frail body dragging on him. She fluttered her lashes on his cheek. "Oh, Nat. Oh, Nat," she cried. "When you were a little boy. Do you remember?" She began to cry hopelessly, whether for herself or because he was going to the war he could not tell. He was shaken with pity, and awed by a sudden sense of the incalculable unfriendliness of life. "Don't cry," he said, dabbing her tears gently with the scented handkerchief. "You're so pretty, you know. Don't cry."

Hers were the only tears he saw. His mother did not cry in his sight. Just before James was dismissed, she had taken a small flat in Chelsea because he complained of being uncomfortable at the club. It had two bedrooms and a tiny sitting-room, in which she waited every night, sitting up to make James a cup of tea at whatever hour in the morning he came home. He climbed five flights of stairs to the top of the building where she was already holding open the door, and the two old friends drank their tea in the kitchen, to save Emily the task she found so difficult of carrying the tray to the sitting-room. Her fingers were all thumbs. But the day after his dismissal James went back to Saints Rew. And this was something his Emily found hard to bear. She had not grudged him to Saints Rew when he was successful, but she could not all at once forgive the house for taking him from her in the day of his failure. She said nothing, but stayed on in the flat, and Nat moving there from Queen Street, she cooked for him. She did it extraordinarily badly. Helpless with laughter, Nat

watched her struggles to prepare breakfast. "How on earth," she asked him furiously, "do people get everything on to the table at the same time? If I take my eyes off the toast it burns black; I rush to it and the kettle boils over, and when I have attended to that the eggs are as hard as stones. Oh, isn't everything dreadful! Don't try to interfere. I don't know what use you expect to be at the war, when you can't even lift a kettle because the handle is hot. . . ."

She resented the hours it took her to make Nat's bed and prepare his dinner, but she continued to do both, scolding a good deal and swearing a little, both softly. One evening when he came in late and hungry, she made him an omelette. It was a striking success. As Emily watched him eat it she felt a curious little thrill of excitement. This had happened before. "Nat," she said, "do you remember those dreadful red stockings I knitted for you when you were five and wanted a red jacket I couldn't afford to buy? They took me *months* and were simply awful, quite shapeless; you put them on and sat stroking your ankles and saying *Lovely-lovely*. I don't know to this day whether you meant the ankles or the socks."

"The socks, darling," Nat assured her. "May I have the rest of the omelette?"

He had had his bath and was in pyjamas and dressing-gown. His hair was darkly wet and untidy, and his eyes bright. He was so attractive that Emily felt a little dizzy. She watched him, marvelling silently at the ease with which he moved his slender young body. He would not have seemed more miraculous to her if he had just been born, aged nineteen. At this moment she could remember none of the stages that had produced the nineteen-year-old Nat from the tiny child he had been, so tiny that for years it did not seem—as now it did—incredible to her that he should have been carried in her body. She sighed. "Oh, Nat."

"What's the matter, darling? Did you want some of this omelette? Why didn't you tell me? You shouldn't let me make such a pig of myself. I only ate it to please you."

"Nat!"

Nat came round the table and stooped over her with a teasing smile. "I couldn't have spared a mouthful," he murmured.

"Go to bed," Emily said. She looked at him helplessly. "Oh dear, you're so thin and young. What shall I do? Oh, Nat. . . ."

Nat sent Denny his aunt's ten pounds and asked her to come to London before he went away to start his training. He had thought of several ways in which to spend it but none of them would have given him the thrill he got from folding up the notes to send them to his wife. She answered him by return. She would come, if he would arrange for her to meet his mother. He must not say they were married or even engaged, but she wanted to see his mother again. Nat disliked this intensely and thought it queer that she should take pleasure in forcing so equivocal a situation. His mother helped him by asking whether there was anyone he would like her to invite to tea before he went.

"Nobody," he said quickly, "unless you'd ask Miss Sadgrove. I have her address. Her father's dead. I—like her." His controlled unyouthful voice startled Emily. She had to accept it, as she had accepted, one by one, the imperceptible changes that, from the moment he was born, had been at work to make her an old woman and her boy a young man. She did not know what he was thinking. He lived beside her a mysterious life in which she had no share, and his dreaming mind was as much of a mystery to her as his hard young body. The cruelty of life was almost more than she could bear.

"I'm not much good at tea-parties," she said humbly. "Would you like to ask her to come to Fanny's?" Nat rewarded her with a dazzling smile.

He shut himself in his room, to write to Denny. "Come quickly, my little love. There are only six days left." He was so sure of her that her reply shocked him. She was coming down with her sister "in a few days, so that Judith will pay the fare." Then he wrote in frantic haste, to know whether she had got his ten pounds. After that he heard nothing, until the evening before he was due to leave, when the telephone at the flat rang, and picking up the receiver he heard her voice. At first she would not see him. There were difficulties, Judith, the late hour. But when Nat pleaded with her ("I must, I must. Denny, please see me."), she agreed to slip out of the hotel.

They met in the squalid darkness of the Euston Road. Nat tucked her arm in his and walked her into a quiet square. There he stopped and took her in his arms. His slender body shook against hers. "Why didn't you come before?" he said quietly. "I have to go tomorrow, you know. I'd have come to you."

"I wanted Judith to pay for my ticket," Denny said.

"I sent you the money."

"I was saving that to buy some clothes. I wanted to look nice when you saw me."

"Darling," the boy mourned, "why didn't you tell me you wanted clothes? I'd have got some money for you from somewhere."

In the darkness they clung together, trembling. A man and a thin woman sauntered past them and stopped under a lamp-post, where they became so tied in each other's arms that they were like a single shadow cast by the lamp. They heard the woman crying. Denny drew herself out of Nat's arms. "Come away," she whispered. "It's vulgar. Standing here."

"I don't care," Nat said. "I am vulgar, and I love you."

But she would go, and he took her back to her hotel, standing on the opposite side of the road to watch her slip through

its forbidding doorway. He expected to the last moment that she would look back.

The next day was not a success. Nat spent the morning stealthily repacking his bag after Emily. He took it to the station, and finding himself with an hour to spare began to walk slowly home, along Piccadilly. Passing the slim bellying facade of the Savile Club, he glanced up and saw George in the window. The Duchess beckoned frantically and disappeared. A moment later he ran down the steps.

"You never left an address, you young ass. I came back last night, and Mrs. Clemens said you'd gone home. I've been wiring to Saints Rew. Come and have lunch. The place is full of old gentlemen but they're not nearly so warlike as, in view of their age, they ought to be. The harder the arteries the higher the gorge. My father's clubs are swimming in blood."

They lunched in the window. The 'buses went up and down in the sunshine, the newsboys shouted a special, and a lady walking elegantly in the Green Park stepped on to the grass and thrust a long gloved arm through the railings to buy a paper. There was a morning freshness about the street, as if it had dreamed in the night that it was a country road going up between trees and green fields.

"That's probably Namur," George said. "It has fallen all right. My father heard at the War Office."

"I'm off today," Nat murmured. "You must hurry up or we shan't get in the same battalion."

"I'm not going."

The long lashes flickered over Nat's eyes. "You can't go back to Oxford, Duchess. You'll miss everything." His eyes were very bright: he looked like a charming and excited schoolboy. "Nothing like it will ever happen again." He smiled lovingly at George, to hide his dismay. "I don't particularly want to go, but if you come with me, it 'ull be perfect."

George's face had fallen in the sullen arrogant lines Nat knew well. It had not taken him long to find out that his friend's urbane manner hid a mulishness which argument and entreaty made worse. He sat now, looking at Nat across a table in the Savile Club just as he looked at Oxford when Nat tried to coax him on to the river. One was a picnic, a lazy troubling of green waters, and the other war, but if George did not feel like it—— "Why don't you want to come?" Nat said helplessly.

"In the first place I don't like danger, and in the second I've got a weak heart," George retorted pleasantly. "This is going to be a nasty bloody mess. You can go and get the medals if you must. I shall win the war in the F.O. The people who turned my father down years ago are quite ready to make it up to him by doing something for me now."

Nat thought: I never heard of your heart before. "My father has been shot out," he said abruptly. "You'd heard, of course."

"Damned shame. The governor says he not only knew more than anyone else but would have done more. He was a gentleman, too."

"Thank you," Nat said softly. "He started life as a chemist, you know." His mind had fallen into the strangest confusion. At Oxford, when George refused to have anything to do with his plans, he had given them up, and cut lectures and picnics with equal readiness, to please his friend. He could not cut a war, but the old enchantment held. He was miserable at the thought of a war without George. The whole thing would be unspeakably boring; he felt uncomfortable, as if he had somehow made a fool of himself. Another feeling, hardly definite enough to be a thought, clouded his mind. It was absurd, it was utterly absurd and sentimental, yet he felt that George

had failed him badly. I would have gone with you on any crazy adventure, he thought, frowning.

He said nothing more about going away, but listened to George's story of a certain Duchess who had called, George said, on his father at nine o'clock on the morning of August the fourth. "Has the army been mobilised?" she demanded, and on hearing that it was decided on, dropped into a chair exclaiming: "Thank God, I can eat again," and forthwith ate four eggs, two slices of ham, half a cold duck and a rack full of toast.

Nat laughed so loudly that an elderly gentleman rose from the table and went out, returning shortly with two others, who peered round the door at Nat. He heard his father's name. "They probably think I'm infectious," he said, and laughed again louder. He drank a glass of port with George. He disliked it but it made him feel pleasantly reckless. Then he went off to get Emily, and take her to his aunt's.

They found that Fanny's niece and ward had arrived the day before, travelling from Switzerland through France. When war broke out no one at her school had quite known what she ought to do. So she had settled the question for herself, while they were still trying to get telegrams through to Fanny, by calling at the British consulate, where she so impressed the young German in charge that he flung himself with enthusiasm into the task of getting her away, finding suitable travelling companions (from whom when they grew tiresome she soon detached herself with polite ease) and advancing money and advice freely, together with a little plan of the route drawn by himself in coloured inks, a large packet of Peters' chocolate and a woolen muffler which he exhorted her to tie round herself in the train. He also told her to sew her money in her stays and was shaken to hear that she did not wear stays. He seemed to think it explained the decline of her country. When

her train steamed off he was still advising, and he ran—he was a plump young man—down the platform, gasping out final instructions in precise German, while the little girl hung out of the carriage window, listening politely. Her last sight of him had been a round apprehensive face and two stocky arms making gestures expressive of caution and *welt-politik*-for-young-maidens.

Fanny Grimshaw was not unattached to her brother's little girl, but she hardly knew what to do with a child. She considered that Ann's mother, never a thoughtful woman, had behaved badly in getting herself killed when Ann was five years old. The accident (was killed climbing) happened when Fanny's illness was at its worst. Ann spent a year at Saints Rew and at the end of it her father turned up, having, it seemed, just then remembered her. Nat's mind retained a clear picture of Ann's parent, a small man with a face at once stolid and delicate, scored with fatigue. He hardly ate but he drank a great deal (he was very testy when Emily said he did his dead wife no service by drinking himself to death, and said: "Be damned to that. I *like* liquor"), and at last went off with his daughter, casually, one fine September morning when Nat was out learning to carry a gun in the proper way. After that he took her about Europe with him until he died, still casually, of a chill and not of fatigue or an impaired stomach or his broken heart. And Ann came back to England again, sent off from Ragusa by the proprietor of the hotel where he had fallen ill. They had forgotten to sew any of the buttons on her clothes and she arrived clutching her little frilled drawers, from which the last support had gone. She was twelve now, a rather clumsy little girl, with charming manners and no education. She had been brought up very like a young horse, to be good-tempered and to behave well in emergencies. Horrified, Fanny packed her off to school, and Nat had not seen her since she cried at going,

when to comfort her he gave her an ivory knight, a pocket-book he had hardly used and half-a-crown, the remains of his uncle's tip. Now, at fifteen, she seemed to him very little altered, except in height. She was still thin and small, with a round childish face and fine straight hair. Her school uniform was the most unbecoming garment he had ever seen, a short black skirt and a black jacket dragged tight across the tiny swelling of her breasts. She had been trying—heaven knows why—to put up her hair, and it was pinned clumsily round her head in two plaits. But she flung herself at Nat.

"My only cousin," she cried. "How beautiful you look. I am glad I've come home."

Fanny was on the verge of a fit of rage. "Every servant in the house has gone to see the soldiers, except Smith, who is in hysterics with her head among the beetles in the scullery. Her brother was reported wounded yesterday. She hasn't seen him for ten years; these people have no self-control. Who is going to get the tea ready, I want to know."

"I can," Ann said cheerfully. She went away and came back shortly with a tray and a plate of thick bread-and-butter. Shutting the door carefully with an elbow, she said: "There's a haughty young woman in the hall. I let her in and she asked for Mrs. Grimshaw. Shall I let her up?"

Ill-mannered little beast, Nat thought. He frowned at her and hurried across the room.

"Why do I have to give your young women tea?" Fanny said tragically. Pushing fan and handkerchief under her pillow, she delayed Nat to search uselessly for them all over the room, until his mother interfered.

He flew down the stairs. "Darling," he said. "I'm sorry. The servants are all out. My mother is upstairs and Ann has got the most horrible tea ready. Do come." He loved her with his eyes, but because she was here on false pretences he did not kiss her.

He knew she expected it, and smiled at her cruelly when she looked at him over her shoulder on the stairs. As he opened the door Fanny said: "Your James! If we weren't all so damned civilised your James would have been impeached and beheaded by now. . . ."

The party was a failure. Once or twice Nat caught himself wishing that Denny would make some concessions to her company. She was overwhelmingly polite to his mother and almost fawned on Fanny, in a way that showed up Emily's old dress and Fanny's temper. But she was so slim and prettily dressed, so lovely, that the boy could not keep his eyes off her. Once he brushed her shoulder with his arm in passing, an accidental thrill that made him smile and change colour. He turned and found Ann's eyes on him. She gave him a sudden sweet smile and spoke to Denny.

"I'm sorry your bread-and-butter is so thick. But the tea's all right, isn't it? I make good tea."

"Have you any other accomplishments?" Denny asked unkindly.

Ann rallied shyly. "None. Except riding, dancing, whistling, and opening the door to callers."

"You should be in a circus," Denny observed, and Ann slipped off into a corner, where she sat in silence with her red childish hands folded in her lap, until Denny got up to go. Then she slid out of the room, to avoid saying goodbye, Nat thought. He was vaguely sorry that she had been snubbed but he forgot her when he was taking Denny downstairs.

"Denny, my train goes in an hour."

"I believe you're looking forward to it."

"In some ways," Nat said. He smiled, not as if he were thinking of her. "It will be something new." He stopped in the hall and caught Denny in his arms. "I must kiss you now. Write to me. Often. Promise you will. I shall miss you so."

"You won't."

"I shall. Oh my dear, my dear, I love you so much."

"Then why are you going?" Denny said. "You needn't. I've been thinking it out. Your father could get you a war post at home, a good post, with money. We're married. We could be together without waiting. Think, we'll have a flat, and be so happy. I'll love you always." She held him tightly, excited and eager, surprising him by the strength in her soft arms.

He felt faintly dismayed. He had never loved Denny so much, and she had never been more sweet and yielding than at this moment when, aching for her, he felt no temptation to stay. He wished the war done. Leaving her was an agony in which his young spirit fainted in him. He clung to her, whispering, kissing her ears and her hair.

"Why won't you do what I want?" Denny murmured. She was sure he would.

Why not? He could not have told her anything, except that he did not feel sentimental, about the war or about England. He wanted Denny now with every fierce decent desire of his sensitive young body, but he wanted something else as well, that had nothing to do with her, an experience from which she was shut out. He could not tell her what he wanted, but he knew that he would not give it up for her. His boy's mouth hardened and a line dug itself across his forehead.

"I must go," he muttered and held her closer.

She snatched herself away, cruelly disappointed. "You don't want me."

The boy groaned. "Oh I do, I do. You're my wife, I love you." He took her in his arms again, and at first she resisted but gave way all at once and fell against him. He kissed her quickly and almost pushed her out of the house, slamming the door after her and leaning against it, with tears in his eyes.

Emily heard that slammed door. It slammed in her face. She felt faint and very old. Fanny said outrageously:

"Mark my words, Emily, that girl will have him clutched into a bed before you know where you are."

The pains of dying could not be worse than this, thought poor Emily.

"And not for the first time," Fanny added thoughtfully.

Emily turned scarlet. "What do you mean by that, Frances Grimshaw?"

"Nothing against your son, my dear. He's as innocent as Ann."

Emily rallied gamely. "He's only sorry for the girl," she said. "Her father is dead. We know her quite well."

The door opened on her sister-in-law's incredulous reply. Nat looked so innocent, so softly engaging, that his mother's heart sank. He had always looked just so when up to mischief. She thought: He'll forget her when he goes away. And then that he could have all the pretty self-conscious young women in the country if he would only come back whole. She gave them to him shamelessly.

A little later she saw him off, and went into the cathedral afterwards, to get out of the hot streets. There were other women praying, and one or two sightseers examining the shrines for evidences of Christianity. Emily knelt behind a soaring shaft and prayed for a miracle, resting her clasped hands on the stone. Let the war end before Nat had finished his training. She prayed to God as a father. When she was a child, in a kindly Victorian household, she had been accustomed to look up to her father as a final power, benevolent, but an appointed despot. Grown older, and tired, she had transferred to God, by a natural impulse, all that early awe. And just as she had gone round, begging a nurse or a mother to intercede for her when some dreadful judgment had been

given, so now she went round to all the saints, begging them to put in a word for her with Him. They knew Him so much better. None of them seemed to have much comfort for a mother (they may have been afraid to establish a precedent in wartime) and at last she began to cry, covering her funny wrinkled face with bare hands. She had taken her gloves off mechanically; they were cheap and the dye might run with her tears. She went from one to another, and they took her sorrow and added it to the measureless burden of griefs laid at their feet—saints' rew.

When she left the cathedral the shadows were lengthening in the streets, long dark shafts falling from the houses, in which her little shadow was lost. She was wearing a ruffle with streamers: it was new, put on for Nat's tea-party, and seemed to have got crushed in the cathedral, but she was too tired to care. . . . She saw a little boy running across the lawn towards her, in a level ray of the sun. His feet left a silvery trail behind him on the wet turf. Inside his jacket he had tucked a white handkerchief, spreading it right across like a waistcoat. "What is it for, Nat?" . . . His eyes were serious . . . "It was dark coming up the lane; I thought, being so small, someone in a cart might run me over, not seeing me." . . . He had not liked to be such a tiny child. It worried him so much that no one dared joke about it. "If I lie straight in bed shall I grow quicker?" . . . "Mother likes you as you are." He turned away, funnily impatient, wrinkling his forehead . . . When Nat looked at her on the station platform, she had caught a glimpse of her little boy: her youth turned about and looked her in the face. It was only for a moment, and she was the older now for remembering that she had been young. How cruel life was. She wanted to stop every woman she met and ask her: "Would you take your son, the little boy pretending now to be grown up and a young man (we know better), and

push him under a lorry to be torn to pieces? Then why do you let other people do it to him? Why don't you scream and stop it?" She was in agony over all the boys who were going to be hurt and tortured to death, whom their mothers were going to allow to be tortured and killed. What were women about to stand by and see their sons die in an agony of shot flesh, and screaming? . . . A clear voice behind her said: "Look at that poor old thing. Do you suppose she's all right?" Of course she was all right. She was old enough to be safe from everything but spiritual pain. It was only fools, who had never imagined war, who said that the pains of the body were less sharp than those of the mind. Rubbing at her face—how angry Nat would be if he could see her crying in the street—she hurried on.

CHAPTER v

NAT had been in training for three months, and in camp on Salisbury Plain for one of them, when Denny wrote to him from London that her sister had discovered the marriage. "She hasn't spoken to me for three days and I can't stay with her any longer. What shall I do?" Hating Judith for her cruelty to his poor love, he was ready to bless her for setting him free. He got twenty-four hours' leave and hurried up to town to see Emily. He saw Denny first. She came to meet him and he scrutinised her anxiously, hardly able to believe that she bore no marks of what she was going through. They had tea in a café near the station and he was glad to see that she ate heartily. He pressed her to have another cake, and watched her with deep satisfaction while she ate it, and a third and a fourth. His heart lightened with every mouthful.

He found Emily out and a notice of his telegram laid on the mat. Expecting that she would be with Fanny, he went there. In the hall he met Ann, and Ann's new dress. She looked taller, but she was still, standing on her toes, below his shoulder. He almost kissed her and then drew back, amused with himself for hesitating to kiss young Ann.

"You're growing up," he said teasingly.

Ann sighed. "I am, and it hurts rather. I wish I were a boy. You look lovely in your new uniform, Nat. Have you broken any hearts?"

"Scores of them," he said solemnly. "Is my mother upstairs?"

Ann nodded. "I wouldn't go up if I were you. Fanny is in a dreadful rage. A policeman called at the house this morning, and when Smith opened the door he said: Have you any spies here? Smith said no, and he went off muttering: We heard you had a young foreigner here, you must mind what you're about, *there's a war on*. He meant me, and Fanny is furious. She has been ringing up the Master of Balliol and the Home Office ever since and she wants Daniel to take it up in the House. Your mother is trying to soothe her."

She sat down beside him on the stairs, her chin resting on her hands.

"I can't make up my mind what to do. Fanny wants me to go to school but that's no good. I'm too old."

"You're still fifteen."

Ann looked at him sideways. "Age has nothing to do with years," she said lightly. "You're as young as I am but I dare-say you'll marry Miss Sadgrove any moment."

"Don't you like her?"

"She's pretty and unkind. *Practice may make her know some other part; But take my word, she doth not know a heart.*"

Nat opened his eyes and smiled. He was fond of Ann. Her self-possession struck him as unnatural and a little pitiful. She was shy with it too, and (he glanced at the book under her arm—it was his uncle's Wycherley) very innocent. She would be quoting from that next. Fanny's was a queer house for a young girl, and no one seemed to bother much with her now. He was trying to find out what she did with her time, apart from reading books she would have been better without, when he heard his mother coming along the landing.

In the flat, he felt that he ought to lead up gently to his marriage, but his impatience got the better of him, and he came out with it in a sentence, badly and coldly, hoping to heaven that his mother would not take it as badly.

Emily said in a shocked voice: "How long did you say you had been—married?"

"Four months."

"Then she was married to you when she came to my sister-in-law's house as Miss Sadgrove." His mother sounded contemptuous, and Nat saw that she was despising Denny for what looked like vulgar curiosity.

"She did it to please me," he said. "I wanted to see her."

Emily turned pale. "You say you're married. Is that—do you mean actually married, or only in form?"

"I haven't lived with her, if that is what you mean," Nat said haughtily. He was angry with his mother for asking questions. She had no right. She had every right. Divided between anger and pity, he held himself stiffly, pressing his lips together. Emily began to cry softly. "Oh darling, you shouldn't have let her. I hate her. She's sly." He began to comfort her then. It might be treachery to Denny, but he could not stand seeing Emily cry. It made him want to cry himself. She was too small and shabby an old lady to be scolded for misjudging his wife.

Next, she offered him the flat for his honeymoon, if he could get leave, and sent him off to see Denny. He kissed her and hurried away. She sat quietly with her hands on her knees, as she used to sit before Nat was born when her body was heavy with him, as she had waited for James to come in from his Ministry, and as she sat in the evening at Saints Rew, with Nat at school and James walking (she knew) from one room to the other, touching his treasures with the teasing fingers of a lover. Her body knew better than her mind, which tried to tell her that she was neither a wife nor a mother now . . .

Nat went back to camp and wrote to her that it would be not less than a month before he could get leave. Would she take Denny, who was unhappy with her sister? She put on her

hat with the two angry roses, and called at the hotel, to find that the girl and her sister had gone back to Scotland that morning. (It surprised her that the Episcopalian bishop had been willing to do without his wife so long.) She had to wait for Denny's address, and when she got it from Nat, wrote as kindly as she could and much more kindly than she felt. She had bought a penny bottle of ink for the purpose, walking a 'bus stage to save the penny, but it was a needless sacrifice, since she wrote with her heart's blood. Denny answering in an elaborately grateful letter, she read it grimly. The next day she went to King's Cross to meet Denny's train. No one should say she had kept anything back.

Denny kissed her on both cheeks. She called Emily "Dear little mother," which annoyed Emily intensely. She was the mother of an only child. Denny had one trunk, a small one, which meant a cab. On the way to the flat Denny's face grew more and more sorrowful, until she confessed that she had no money.

"Nat had no right to marry a wife he could not support," Emily said austerely.

"Oh but, mother, you don't know how much he loves me," Denny cried. The mother turned pale. She hurried away into the kitchen with trembling knees, and began to prepare tea. She heard Denny singing to herself as she unpacked. Her mouth softened. After all, the girl was young, and must think what she should of Nat. Emily believed that Nat's smile was irresistible. Buttering toast, she advised herself fiercely that if he was old enough to fight he was old enough to be married. She would not allow her thoughts to remember what would become of his boy's body when a shell struck it or when he took his young woman. She carried in the tea, and knocked on Denny's door. The singing stopped. "Come in, mother."

Gingerly opening the door, Emily looked in. The first thing

she saw was the little table covered with jars of cream, powder boxes, tall flasks containing lotions, and a large cut-glass bottle of scent. "Are those all yours?" she exclaimed, mortified by her simplicity before the words were out of her mouth.

Denny laughed. "I believe in taking care of a lovely skin when you have it. Don't you? You're looking at my bottle of scent. A dear friend of mine gave it to me as a parting gift. He was so sad when I came away."

Emily kept her mouth shut, unable to find any civil answer. A parting gift. No one gave her gifts at parting or coming, since James made all his presents to Saints Rew and Nat had no money. What could have reminded her at this moment of the kettleholder that Nat had worked for her fortieth birthday? His tiny fingers fumbled with the needle and when he went to bed she added rows of stitching to help him out. He never noticed the miracle, since her stitches were as clumsy as his own . . . She could not bear to remember it.

She scurried back to the sitting-room, followed by Denny. All through tea she brooded over that array of jars and bottles, thinking to herself that a good woman did not cover her face with harlotries. She could not eat. Her throat closed up when she thought that Nat's innocence had betrayed him. She watched Denny consuming toast and cakes with the appetite of a large man and wondered whether she always ate so much.

After tea Denny put on her hat to go out. She did not offer to clear the table, and Emily could not bring herself to ask where the girl was going, in the evening, in London.

"I suppose you will be back soon," she observed. "I usually have supper at eight." This was a lie, since Emily's practice was to sup in bed, surrounded by newspapers, and disbelieving every word she read.

Denny hesitated. "I'm sure you won't mind, will you, mother, if I just say something about—well, about supper."

"Please do," Emily said pleasantly, feeling herself in a strong position here. "I'm very simple. I eat an apple and bread-and-butter myself. There is—" she paused to give weight to her triumphant words—"cold bird, for you." She had prepared it in the morning, with much running to and fro, and little screams as she forced herself to explore its interior. Central Europe was not more dark and bloody.

"I was just going to say, I don't eat cold things at all. They're not very good for the complexion, and I am sure you agree with me that a beautiful woman has a duty to herself. I know that Nat would."

Well, really, thought poor Emily, seeing her cold bird on the cupboard shelf, like a rejected sacrament, at least the girl's no hypocrite. Her hospitable instincts came to help her. "I could make you an omelette, my dear. I make a good omelette. Or, at least, the boy says so."

Denny looked relieved. "You're sure you don't mind, little mother?"

"Not at all," Emily said politely. When Denny had gone, she thought grimly that if she were to be called "little mother," she might as well get used to it at once. The telephone rang. She knew it must be Fanny and was prepared for the eager question: "What is she like to have in the house?"

"Oh *darling*," Emily began, and bit it off short. Nat's wife must be given a chance. "She's had tea and gone for a walk," she said, as if Denny were a new species, whose habits were as yet unknown. The next words slipped out in spite of herself. "She calls me 'dear little mother.' Yes. *Dear* little mother. Like Catherine the Great of Russia." Her mouth twitched humorously.

"Darling, how dreadful," Fanny wailed.

"She eats a lot, too," Emily said cautiously, her mouth close to the receiver. She glanced over her shoulder, with an uneasy

sense that she might be overheard now that the privacy of her house had been destroyed. And certainly Denny, if she could have heard, would have found nothing either humorous or pathetic in the spectacle of these two ageing ladies whose lives she was devastating by her thoughtless beauty and her appetite, their lips pressed against the telephone as they discussed, almost in whispers, the incalculable expense of supporting a revolution.

“You can’t afford it, Emily.”

“I shall have to buy a cookery book, how to cook on an egg a week. I know I shall never be able to cook properly. I always forget something. The other night I made Nat a welsh rarebit: it stuck to the sides of the dish and we had to hack it off with a screwdriver.” She caught Fanny’s smothered shriek of laughter. “It’s all very well for you to laugh,” she grumbled. “Sitting there ordering tiny pink cutlets for someone else to cook. . . .”

Denny came back at eight o’clock, smiling and humming. Now, where can she have been, Emily wondered ironically. *Up to no good.* She shook as she broke the eggs for her omelette. It got the better of her, and Denny ate it to the last mouthful, like a hungry schoolgirl. I believe she could have eaten more, Emily said to herself; and eggs are fourpence, I shall be ruined. She cleared away, and it was her point of honour not to ask for the help that Denny did not offer. At nine o’clock Denny went to bed. “I never sit up after ten unless I’m taken out,” she explained. “Sleep is better than cold cream. Good-night, mother.” Her preparations for sleep lasted an hour and when Emily went into the bathroom she found the bath coated thickly with a greasy slime. The discovery filled her with horror, as if she had found Nat’s wife performing an obscene rite. “Something she uses in her bath,” she said aloud. Weakness succeeded to her horror, and she sat down trembling. After a

time she went away and came back carrying a cloth, with which she thoroughly scrubbed the bath. She washed the cloth and folded it away for use again, calmly, far past the weakness of hope. Then she took her own bath and went to bed, to lie awake for a long time. The peace of her tiny flat was irretrievably gone, she would never be comfortable in it again. She would have to go back to Saints Rew, and James, who would be kind to her because he had never loved her very much. The thought of James's kindness comforted her, and she fell asleep as a little light came over the top of the blind.

After tea on the following day, Denny came to her with the ingratiating smile she already knew so well. Wondering first what the girl wanted of her now, she scolded herself for a suspicious-minded old woman. It was no use. Her mind, once as clear as the brown stream below Saints Rew, was muddled with doubts.

"Mother, do you mind if I go out to dinner with George Savill? He asked me. I happened to meet him on my way home yesterday."

"Why, of course you must go. Why ask me?"

Denny went away to dress, and Emily trotted round her kitchen, congratulating herself on a dinner saved. A sudden thought struck her. She hurried along the passage to Denny's door. "Denny!"

"Yes? Come in, mother. I'm dressing."

Emily set the door ajar but did not go in. "Denny," she said from the passage, "I've just remembered. I can't give you permission to go out with this Mr. Savill. You must ask Nat, you're his wife."

Denny's sweet affected voice cried: "But Nat likes me to go out with Mr. Savill. He's so fond of him." The door swung open, startling Emily.

Nat had slept in his room only a few nights, but it had thus

become his room, taking the place of the one at Saints Rew in which he kept nineteen years of memories, so few that the brown shiny chestnuts—*conkers*—rolling out from the back of an opened drawer seemed less incongruous to his mother than the two dress shirts it contained, laid neatly side by side in double splendour. She could not get used to the idea of a wife in the boy's room. She stood looking at the accidents of Denny's presence there—clothes dropped on chairs, floor and bed, powder puffs and jars on the table—with a comical pursed mouth, trying not to despise Denny for the helpless disorder of her room. Emily was very neat herself, what you call old-maidishly so. Nat was like her in that, and she saw, laid as he had left them, a gold pin arranged exactly parallel with two bottles in their shabby leather cases: one held brilliantine, the other was empty because he did not know what to do with it and was too housewisely to throw it away. Denny had taken off her dressing-gown and was putting scent on her hair and herself. Emily Grimshaw was profoundly shocked. Wickedness, this was, even more than waste, since no honest woman should need doubtful allurements. Denny put down her spray and reached for her clothes. "I scent myself before I dress," she said calmly. "It has a jollier effect."

"Decent women never do these things," Nat's mother exclaimed harshly, before Emily could remind her that she was talking to Nat's wife.

Denny's face, appearing over the top of her petticoat, was more expressive than Emily had yet seen it. "What do you mean by that, mother?" she demanded. But Emily hurried off and shut herself in her room. She was horrified by the depths of disgust and dislike that her own words had revealed to her. The girl was only young, four years older than Nat, but still young. Oh, but she's not good, her heart cried. She rocked

herself about on the edge of her bed, moaning gently. "Oh Nat, oh my boy."

But she had spent half a lifetime in laughing at herself and her blunders, hurrying after her own quick tongue without ever being able to catch it up. She began to make excuses for herself and more for Denny. The poor girl had been badly brought up—who was her mother?—a mad father, and a sister (probably dreadful) whom no one had ever seen. Emily reflected bitterly that she had brought Nat up with much care only to have him fall in love with a—a conceited young woman. She got up to go and apologise to the young woman, but the front door slammed before she opened her own. Fanny's evening telephoning began as she stood in the tiny hall, dreading what Nat would say if he knew what had happened. She'll tell him I ill-treat her, she thought forlornly: It's not true, I wait on her hand and foot; I'm sorry it's always omelettes, but you can't expect miracles at my time of life. She forgot that she had once worked a miracle every night.

"Well—" Fanny's voice sounded gay. "How are you going on?"

Emily got as close to the telephone as she could. "*She scents her body all over.*"

"Good gracious, where does she get it from?"

"I don't know. Yes I do. A parting gift. Tell me, *do* decent girls—as decency goes in these days—scent themselves all over?"

"Very likely," Fanny said cautiously. "They do a lot of things you and I never had the wit to do. I put eau-de-cologne in my bath, you know."

Emily shuddered. Impossible to tell even Fanny about the bath. "She's gone out to dinner with George Savill."

"Very nice for her."

Her sister-in-law's voice sounded doubtful and Emily said hurriedly: "It's all right. He's a friend of Nat's."

"I don't suppose that makes it any better," Fanny observed gloomily. "You'd better bring her to dine here. Not that it will amuse her, but it will save you a meal, and Daniel hasn't seen her yet. . . ."

Waiting for Denny's return, she wondered what the girl would say to her. Denny came running up the stone stairs gaily. She went off to bed at once, cutting short Emily's little speech with a cheerful: "Never mind, dear little mother, I quite understand," a charitable flourish that overwhelmed poor Emily. She crept off to bed, with her pile of the day's newspapers, through which, supported by a cup of tea, she patiently read, trying to discover a chance that the war would be over before Nat went. "It ought never to have been allowed to happen," she muttered fiercely. "It's all the fault of those damned Liberals and their shilly-shallying ways." Before she went to sleep she wrote to Nat. "Darling, this dreadful war is going on for ever. You mustn't believe anyone who tells you I have insulted her. You know what young women are nowadays, they want their husbands to quarrel with everyone for their sakes. I was too frightened of my mother-in-law to answer her back. Oh Nat, do you think the war will be over soon? I took this flat for a year, and if it's not over then we had better go to Saints Rew. She will get tired of omelettes. Bless you, my darling boy. I think of you night and day. Fanny sends her love and says: *Remember you are a married man.* It is ridiculous, you are only nineteen and nothing but a child. But I'm not going to speak about that. Goodbye and bless you. Do you want anything? Your aunt is knitting socks. I tried but made an awful muddle."

Denny's letter explained what was obscure to Nat in this. He thought impatiently that she might contrive to steer clear of his mother's prejudices, but he was angry with his mother too. He wrote a long letter to Denny, telling her the details of his

life in camp, from the early morning march with the men singing (no sound ever caught at his heart like this of men singing as they marched) and the long grass of the hedgeside heavy with dew, to the last sounds at night, ringing like glass in the frosty air. He wrote in the mess hut, with a brazier of logs at his back. His eyes smiled and he ended his letter: “‘Meet me at London, then, Twenty days hence, and thou shalt see, Me fresher, and more fat, by being with men. For God’s sake, if you can, be you so too.’ Darling, what a fool I am. Forgive me, and say you love me in spite of it. . . .”

Emily took her son’s wife to St. James’s Place to dine. Denny looked so pretty that it was almost possible to forget her self-conscious manner. She had a charming, smothered laugh, with an undercurrent of tiny sounds like the running of innumerable trickles of merriment into one soft gurgling fall. Emily’s heart softened to her every time she laughed. But she was conscious that girl was not a success, and brought her away as early as possible. On the way home, resenting for her Fanny’s raised eyebrows, she said: “Would you like us to go down to Saints Rew?”

Denny clasped her hands: “Oh no, mother. London is so much more amusing. And besides—Nat has told me how unhappy he always was there.”

Emily grew hot and then so cold that she thought her lips were stiffening. “You must be making a mistake,” she said. “Nat was always happy.”

Her daughter-in-law smiled. “Nat says anything,” she murmured. “He’s dreadfully weak-minded.”

“If that’s what you think of my son, I wonder you married him,” the mother said stiffly.

Denny glanced sideways. Did she know how cruel she was being? She must have been blind not to see Emily’s knees trembling. She did see them, and she rejoiced in her own feel-

ing of youth and strength. It gratified her to see how easily she could destroy Emily's peace of mind. Yet she was not a monster of wickedness, she was only young and not by nature kind, and had never been taught manners.

"If Nat hadn't married me when he did, I shouldn't have waited for him," she said lightly. "He knew that."

Emily said nothing at all, but her body shook with anger. When they reached the flat she carried the telephone into her bedroom, fitted up for it with a second plug, and got into bed, taking it under the clothes with her. She rang up her sister-in-law and told her in a choked voice what Denny had said. "I should like to smite her head from her body," she whispered.

"You wouldn't really, you know," Fanny said earnestly.

"She deserves it. Why did she marry Nat, and why does she go out with *other men*?"

"When you had gone, Daniel said: 'Poor Nat's been had.' He has been making enquiries, and it seems that Professor Sadgrove married the step-daughter of a baker, and a very inferior baker too. The eldest girl got an education but this one, Nat's, had none. If you don't mind my saying so, Emily darling, for a young person of that class she is not bad. A mass of vanity, of course, and *stupid*. Couldn't you tell her not to talk? And not to ogle men. It quite shocked Daniel."

Emily groaned softly. "Damn your Daniel. What does Nat see in her?"

"My dear Emily, he hasn't seen her. They can't have met more than half a dozen times. She's ravishingly pretty, you know. Nat has only to look at her to believe she's charming and amiable and loving."

Emily's eyes flashed. "She believes in taking care of a good skin when she has it." She hung up the receiver and emerged from the bedclothes suddenly. Switching off the light, she leaned out of her window. The sky—all that was visible to her

—was a deep rich lilac, and in it the half-grown moon riding behind the houses. The night was actively quiet, with all the houses holding their breath. Emily felt the strangeness of these sleeping houses, swinging through space with their burden of lives, pursued between breakfast and supper with passion and certainty and immortal longings. In some of the houses soldiers on leave were sleeping their last sleep in England, in one here and another a woman was stretching out hands to touch—for the last time—the husband who would never lie, warm and quietly breathing, beside her again. I am nothing, Emily thought: why do I suffer?

She closed the curtains again and prepared to get into bed. But a curious sound disturbed her prayers. When she rose from her knees it had ceased. It began again, like the complaining of a child. She listened, opening her door; it was Denny, sobbing quietly to herself.

Emily stood still. The sound, in the quiet flat, affected her strangely. It invaded her, pulling at her, like fingers in her dress. She tiptoed to the girl's room and listened again. The sound continued. Softly, using both hands, she turned the handle.

“Are you asleep, Denny?”

The bedclothes stirred. “Oh mother, I feel so ill.”

“What's the matter? What is it?” Emily stood beside the bed, peering at the crushed-up figure. “I'll turn on the light.”

Denny lay with crimson cheeks and clenched hands. “I feel ill. My side hurts.”

“Which side?”

Denny pressed her hand against her right side. She looked up at Emily with a trustful imploring gaze.

“You've caught a chill.”

Denny moved her head from side to side on the pillow. “No I haven't. It's a kind of pleurisy that I have sometimes. It

just comes. When it comes at night, Judith gets me a cup of tea."

"I'll get you a cup of tea, my dear. Lie still. I won't be long." Emily smoothed the sheet and hurried away to the kitchen. When she came back, Denny took the tea gratefully. Her hair fell, covering the pillow, splendid shining hair. She laid a hot hand on Emily's wrist. "Thank you, mother."

Emily was struck with a feeling of sadness. The girl had an air of pathos, lying here, alone with an old woman who hated her, thankfully accepting tea from her enemy's hand. Her look of experience, all her affectations, had dropped away, leaving her fragile, exposed, young. Why, thought Emily, surprised, she is less able to look after herself than I am, she has nothing except her youth and her looks. But Denny had used these to marry Nat, and Emily could not forgive her for it. Yet this little scene in the silence of the night was disturbing her in some profound fashion.

Denny handed back the cup and closed her eyes, pressing her lips together. "Do you feel better?" Emily asked gently.

"Yes thank you, mother."

"Can you sleep?"

"I think so."

"Good-night, my dear."

Denny only sighed. Emily crept out of the room, closing the door. When she carried the cup back to the kitchen she stood there a moment, conscious of the mysterious life of the flat flowing round the lives of its two inmates. At last she sighed and slipped away to bed, a little tired old woman accompanied by a monstrous shadow.

CHAPTER vi

A FORTNIGHT after the night of Denny's illness Nat got ten days' leave. The battalion was leaving for France. Emily made the flat ready for his honeymoon and went off, before he came, to stay with Fanny. Just before she left, when Denny had gone to the station, she put ten pounds in an envelope and addressed it to Nat. It was her wedding present. She surveyed her flattened purse calmly, feeling it less queer to have only a few shillings there than she had felt when the two folded bank-notes bulged it out. The envelope she propped on the chest of drawers in Nat's room. She stood for a moment looking round the room at Denny's things there, and at the bed. The dressing-gown she had given him for his nineteenth birthday—a few months ago, and older than Denny—hung on the door, where he had left it because the old one was good enough for camp. At last she went away, carrying her shabby dressing-case, James's wedding present (it was a miracle, not a present), and shut the door of the flat behind her, but softly, as if she were afraid of the sound it made.

She had arranged to return to her flat early on the last afternoon of his leave. But when the day came, though she left Fanny's house and arrived at the flat she could not bring herself to go in. She hid her small luggage in a corner of the staircase and walked guiltily away. Through the brief afternoon she trotted about Chelsca trying to get the better of her violent shrinking. She could not bear to come in on them.

Suddenly she was seized with a panic fear that Nat would

be gone before she got to him. Turning round she began to hurry through the streets, her lips moving . . . Nat as a small boy going off with the school cadet corps to camp . . . She recalled the anguished weeks before authority decided that he was tall enough to go . . . "Mother, it's all right. They said never mind the last half inch." . . . His eyes danced. "Can you spare as much as ten shillings? Can you really *spare* it?" . . . He had learned a lot of dreadful language there . . . Emily clutched at the ends of her dissipated old boa and tried to run. A taxi drew up at the curb and a girl stepped out of it. For a moment she stood with her arms round the neck of the young officer stretching his slim body out of the window. A hurried conversation. "Goodbye." "Shall you be all right?" he asked anxiously. "Yes. Goodbye." She stepped back right on to Emily and the taxi moved off . . . Emily thought: "I can't run any more . . . I believe she's crying." . . . Half-way down the street a door banged in front of her and she collided blindly with a soldier coming out of the house with his kit on his back. He had a wooden look and the eyes he turned on Emily were empty and dark. The thought flashed across Emily's mind that all over England the doors of small houses were shutting for the last time behind figures in unaccustomed khaki. Their footsteps sounded for a little time in streets and lanes, and were gone.

She reached the flat barely half an hour before Nat must go. At the last moment she left the boy alone with his wife, in the tiny sitting-room. The door was open and she heard Denny's smothered words: "I do love you, Nat. I can't bear it."

The boy said desperately: "You can. You must. Remember —everything."

There was a long silence. Then Nat came out of the room, shutting Denny in. He kissed his mother, picked up his bag and went off, slamming the door. Half an hour later there was

a ring at the door. Emily opened it on Nat. His eyes were dancing with mischief.

"I missed the train," he said. "It's your fault, darling. None of your clocks ever go. I shall have to catch the six o'clock train tomorrow morning."

"Will it—matter?" Emily croaked.

"Not a bit. I could have waited for it anyway." The door of his room opened and there was Denny in her dressing-gown, startled. Nat looked at her with arched eyebrows. His face was soft and mocking.

"What are you doing, my only one?" he asked sweetly. "Putting on sackcloth or dressing up?"

"I was going to the Savoy," Denny said. "John Clifford asked me. He's in town now. Why did you say you had to go tonight if you can stay until tomorrow?"

"I hate getting up in the middle of the night." He rubbed his head against her shoulder. His face changed and became smooth and secret.

"I'll take you to the Savoy," he murmured.

Emily cried harshly: "Nat. You can't afford it." She wanted to say: "See what she's like when you're away. *I* can't stop her." A stupor of anger had taken possession of her.

"Of course I'd much rather go with you," Denny answered.

"Generous of you," Nat said lightly. He swung her round by the shoulders and pushed her gently towards her room. "Hurry up and dress, my girl. Shall I come and dress you or shall I ring up my mature rival? Have it your own way." Denny shut the door in his face.

Nat walked his mother into the sitting-room with an arm round her waist. Emily was trembling violently.

"And what were *you* doing to celebrate my departure?" he demanded.

"Oh darling," Emily said and began to cry. Nat dried the tears with one of his new khaki silk handkerchiefs.

"I didn't expect you to come back."

"Well, don't cry about it, I'm going away again."

Struck by the sound of his voice, Emily said suddenly: "I believe you want to go."

Nat looked down at her with a small reminiscent smile. "It's been good fun so far," he said. "The other fellows—oh and the life. One feels part of some big thing. And it's an adventure, something with an edge to it."

Emily said slowly: "When you were a little boy you wanted to go to camp because you said it made you feel free. Do you remember?"

Nat nodded. "I suppose I feel free now. There's nothing to worry about but the men and the job. It's a good life. I like it." Bright-eyed, he stared absently.

His mother looked up at him, noticing for the first time the changes in him since he became a soldier. He had broadened slightly, and the curved lines between his eyes cut deeper. The smoothness of his face seemed faintly blurred, as if a hand had been at work there, rubbing out the childishness she had, before he went away, yet found in it. But it was a boy's face still, now softened by a teasing smile.

"You'd better come to the Savoy, too, mother."

"No thank you," Emily said indignantly. "I know my place better than that. What could I do in a restaurant full of hideous fat men with napkins tucked under their chins? I should be sitting there while you and Denny danced round, wishing they would choke to death. Ugh!"

Nat laughed. He stood up and stretched his arms. Emily watched him as he turned impatiently from window to door. "Denny," he called at last, "aren't you nearly ready?" When she came he looked at her quizzically. "Is this how you were

going with our trusty and well-beloved Clifford? Very much the gay young widow, aren't you, my girl?"

"Don't tease your wife," Emily said, surprised to read distress in Denny's eyes. But Nat went from bad to worse and mocked the girl outrageously. The angrier and statelier Denny grew the louder he laughed, until she refused to go out with him. Then he put an arm round her shoulders and held her firmly. "My only love," he said, "I'm sorry. I'm so excited to-night I hardly know what I'm doing. Forgive me and come along. You look beautiful."

"Going away is exciting you," Denny said accusingly.

"Going away. And you. And everything. I don't know. Oh come along," Nat urged her. "Let's go now, my sweet." He smiled at both women through his lashes. The most extravagant words and phrases came into his mother's mind. "You are so beautiful . . . my darling, my little baby . . . Nat." He stood rocking gently on heels and toes, hands pressed against slender hollowed sides, young and triumphant, smiling with dear mockery at his wife. His youth was a flame in his bright eyes, lit and burning at his own sacrificial altar.

He hurried Denny off. Emily heard him laughing on the stairs, at the other side of the door.

It was late when they came home. Lying in bed, the mother listened to their whispers and footsteps in the flat until the door of their room shut at last and all was silent. She got up at half-past four to call them and a few minutes later she went along to the kitchen to make Nat a cup of tea. Denny was there, in her dressing-gown, standing with the tea-pot in her hand. When Emily came in she whirled round and stood defensively in front of the stove.

"I'm waiting for the kettle to boil," she said fiercely.

"I was going to make the boy some tea."

"I'm getting it."

Emily stood looking at her for a moment. The girl's feet were bare and her cheeks were warm and flushed. She had come straight from the boy's bed to the kitchen. Shivering with sudden cold, Emily turned and went back to her own room.

CHAPTER VII

IN the third week of November 1916, and a freezing cold, Nat's battalion was in support at Beaucourt-sur-Ancre, inhabiting uncomfortably a German trench. The trench ran below the lip of a ridge, and the line, held by two companies of a Fusilier battalion, was less than four hundred yards in front.

Nat had fallen asleep about midnight, dead-beat. At three o'clock in the morning he heard the Colonel shouting for a light. Voice and words penetrated Nat's mind first. Then—and it had been going on before the Colonel shouted—he became aware of a terrific noise outside. He tightened his puttees, and shook himself in his creased clothing, like a dog; and began to shout himself, for an orderly. Staggering out of the dugout he met Sykes falling down the stairs and shouting for his telephonist. Nat thought irritably, "You can't hear anything in this bloody noise."

His hand providentially found his torch and he stumbled about, assembling the headquarters staff. The main noise was away on the right. Nothing was happening immediately in front, though the British guns were all talking together. He could see lights, red and green, going up, and then the repeated signal of despair, the British S.O.S. lights floating and dipping. Details of the alarm began to fall together in his mind. He got back to headquarters dugout and began to telephone to the companies. Nothing was happening on the left. Communication with the right broke down on an excited appeal for more bombs, and he sent off a scratch crowd, signallers, orderlies,

bombers, telephonists, about twenty men, lugging boxes of bombs. At a quarter past three a white and green light went up from the Boche lines and a mild barrage began. It went on for twenty minutes and ceased. At half-past four he could give the order to stand down.

Sykes, known in the battalion as the Bloody Child, rolled over and went to sleep. He was eighteen, a Wykehamist from Nat's own house, and two years Nat's junior: also he had a pure delicate face and his mind was an unplumbed pit of infamous jests and foul language. Nat was too tired to sleep again. He sat down, staring through the darkness in the direction of the Bloody Child. For a moment or two he wondered how the boy could sleep in so uncomfortable a position, one knee drawn up to his chest and his arm under his head. Then he began to think of his father whom he had seen, less than a fortnight ago, at Army headquarters. The M.G.G.S. was a friend of James's, and had arranged it all. "Decent of him," Nat said aloud and loudly. The general's red glossy face, bursting through its skin, floated before him like a blood-red moon he had seen rising a night or two ago and thought a new German stunt. He pulled his thoughts together. His father was gay. He told Nat about his successor at the Ministry. The Honourable James Coyle-Read was a Yorkshireman, secretive, shrewd, and tortuous-minded, with the face of a horse-stealer. It was his misfortune, since when he was honest and brave, which he sometimes was, his face belied him, and when he was wriggling along a diplomatic sewer of his digging he could not even look innocent.

"He gets the blame for everything," James said. "For withholding information from the Cabinet, for giving it to them, for misleading the public, for depressing them, for being slow, for his wife being fast, for every mistake that the politicians and the soldiers fail to shift on to each other." He added, sur-

prising Nat: "Your uncle Daniel will have him out before Christmas and himself in."

"What the devil does my uncle want with it?"

James said gently: "Daniel believes he has a mission to save England."

"But he knows nothing," Nat exclaimed.

"Neither does anyone else," his father retorted. "Coyle-Read rang me up to ask whether Rumania had a navy. I said they were building as fast as possible, and he was very satisfied. I had to wait ten minutes and then apologise for the mistake. After Loos the Cabinet was like a hen-roost with the fox in. The soldiers were all calm enough, being busy counting their dead and calculating how many young men they could afford to kill off in a season."

Nat said: "You can't afford to think that way, sir. A friend of mine, a gunner Colonel, was on and about the Ypres-Menin road on the night of October the thirty-first 1914. There was nothing between the Boche and the sea, yet they did not advance. He rode all day along the roads and never saw a German. The infantry were coming back too fast—they had to draw revolvers on them: they put one of their gunners on a horse and told him to ride slowly towards the enemy. Men in retreat always say they're the last of their company, but he found out later that these men really had been in hell . . . I'm not telling you what I want to . . . You can't let us off—the fighters—because we've been in hell. It confuses the issue. I mean—you can't ask people to go down into hell and then think about them in terms of ordinary existence."

His face creased into smiles. "I don't know what I'm talking about," he said. "It's been fun for me. I don't mean the mud and the stinks and seeing decent men done in. But the life itself." He stretched out thin young arms in stained khaki. "I wouldn't have missed it for a universe."

James realised that his son was now a citizen of another country. England no longer existed for him, except as a lotus-eater's dream of home. Its woods and pastures were faded, dimmer and less entrancing than the distant line of trees behind the armies. He was a happy exile.

He said wistfully: "You ought to see Saints Rew now. It's lovelier than ever. I've asked several people to come down to admire it, but everyone is too busy."

Too busy to call on a disgraced minister, Nat thought. There had been another fierce attack on his father in the House, but James pretended not to notice the silence that now attended him. He made excuses for invited guests who forgot either to come or to make their own. When an old colleague cut him in Pall Mall he said the poor man's sight was failing and went on talking courage and gratitude as if both these qualities existed among politicians, and he punctually answered telephone entreaties for information from ministers and secretaries who had crossed the street to avoid him the day before.

Nat longed furiously to defend his father against political human nature. Instead of which he taught James a new and complicated card game, using a pack of cards so curiously marked with mud and sweat that cheating became involuntary. James was delighted. They went on playing until two in the morning, when Nat climbed on to the battered Crosley that was to take him as far as Divisional headquarters. He stowed the cards in his breast pocket and waved to James, who forgot until the last sound of the car had died away that the temperature was well below freezing and his night's lodging some streets away. As he stumbled along the black and slippery pavement a woman spoke to him from the arch of a doorway. Her voice was hopeless and it was clear that she expected

nothing. James glanced at her with a gentle anguish. He wanted to reassure her, to fill her with belief in herself.

"*Pas ce moment*," he murmured. "*A demain, à demain. . . .*"

At half-past five Nat climbed out of the dugout again. He had seen dawn come up beyond the armies many times, but it had not lost its thrill. He saw it each time as the first man must have seen it, hardly able to believe that it was a cosmic habit. War, existence in trenches and the cellars of ruined houses, had erased from his mind that belief in the continuity of life which is one of the stigmata of civilisation. Like that first man, he lived now in the minute, in a world where death and dying is the established order and life a transitory accident. It made life real, sharp, and joyful. When he found himself alive after an attack he was stung with amazement and pleasure: the wind on his eyelids was the first wind to blow in a newly-created world, his feet slipped in primal mud. Each day rose over the horizon of a strange new earth: his eyes ached with staring at it. He forgot the night, which would come on him, if he lived so long, imperceptibly, the universe dissolving before him as before the first man.

Light came up slowly. Before dawn the country was visible in a twilight, like one of those scenes lying at the bottom of glass globes. Everywhere the earth was blackened and torn, full of shell holes, with stripped trunks of trees. A few heaps of bricks marked the site of the village behind the ridge, more desolate and irrevocably lost than Pompeii and the ruined cities of the desert. Close to Beaucourt station lay the skeletons of five wagons and their teams, the disintegrating echo of a moment when a shell fell on a Boche ration convoy. There was a stench, the breath of corruption, a mixed smell of exploded picric acid, gas, blood, rotting bodies and broken bricks. A murdered house has its own smell. The Germans were not long gone, and there were still corpses scattered over the earth

now reviving in the growing light, an officer with his back on the lip of the trench, his fingers stiffened and clutching, and down by the roadside a Boche, caught by a piece of shell as he turned to run back up the road. There was another on the hill top, a fine figure of a man, proud and fierce, with a moustache and imperial. He had died fighting. The burial parties were working without rest—eight hundred Englishmen and forty Germans, gathered within a few yards of each other, had been got under the day before—but there were still plenty about. The speed with which the dead were got rid of was one of the most remarkable things about a war more remarkable than any recorded since the fall of Lucifer. They fell and dropped into the earth, seeds of which the harvest is still in doubt.

Nat watched light dissolve in the sky and flow over the earth. The chalky ground was covered with a thick frost, which at every angle took on a different hue and flashed delicately pink, cream, gold, and a blinding white. Sunk in a brief quiet, the scene was ineffably lovely.

He looked along the trench. The men had dug the earth out under the parapet and were crouching and lying under its overhanging lip. He felt a quick protective love for them. They were part of himself. He would never forget them, their faces and their bodies, all alike in their clumsy clothes.

Suddenly he remembered his bombers, of whom nothing had been heard since he sent them off. Turning away, to telephone to C company for news, he thought: I lose my temper too quickly nowadays, I must pull up. But just as he crouched down beside the wretched instrument, the early morning barrage began, and he felt the familiar irritation plucking at his nerves. The skin of his body tightened, too frail a defence against that indecent assault of noise. He bit on the stem of his pipe. Heavy lines appeared in his face, between his eyes and

down each cheek. His happiness retreated into his eyes, bright and guarded between their reddened rims.

He got through to C company on the right, only to be told that no carrying party had turned up. Where the devil were they? The whole lot of them could not have been wiped out? A vision of their mangled bodies floated before his eyes. He swore at Sykes and sent the boy off breakfastless to search.

The Boche was putting up a terrific barrage to the right of the line. Stray shells were making the support trenches unpleasant. A thick mist had rubbed out the first clarity of dawn and the cold was suffocating. In time a breakfast of unparalleled vileness came along and in the middle of it Sykes returned with the missing men, discovered in a trench. They had gone half their way in the darkness when the firing ceased, whereupon they decided to go no farther and lying down on the spot fell asleep, dead-beat. At nine o'clock the Boche firing on the front line increased in violence. Nat could picture the men who were enduring it, lying dazed and quivering in that hell of noise. He tried to telephone to his friend Perry Smith, in command of C company. The wire, mended once by linesmen working out in the fog, was broken again, and he sent off a runner. He found Sykes and cursed him for not getting his men together. Perry was lost somewhere in chaos. Nat pushed a book into his pocket and returned to battalion headquarters. The trench, not meant to be held, had only two dug-outs, both ranged by the Germans who had been driven out. Shells fell on the headquarters dugout every few minutes, and the only way of entering it was to wait round the corner and seize a chance. Nat seized his and shot inside, sliding five yards over the mud. He got in just ahead of a burst of shrapnel. "That's those damned gunners of ours again, sir," he told the Colonel. One of the four guns of the battery covering them had a trick of firing short. Cured for a time, it invariably did

it again. Nat telephoned furiously to Brigade. At ten o'clock a runner, not his man, came in with a message from Perry Smith. He was a very young boy, smiling and bright-eyed. "Is Captain Smith all right?" "Yes, sir." The boy's voice betrayed the northern farm-lad: it came from the other side of bare moors and valleys filled with rushing water. Nat could have kissed him. Perry had no news except that the line in front of him was being blown to blazes. His men were standing to for orders. The Colonel read the message and got through to the brigade, which knew nothing and had no orders to give.

"No one knows anything in this damn war," he grumbled. His long ironic face twitched with nervous annoyance. "Grimshaw."

"Sir."

"Write young Perry to keep in touch."

About noon Nat's runner returned. "You've been a hell of a time," Nat growled. The man looked at him reproachfully. Neither mud nor khaki could make him anything but a civilian, one of that type of patient melancholy working-man who travels to and from his work in trams, calloused hands doubled on his stained corduroy knees. His eyes, blue and gentle, rested wistfully on Nat.

"I been an hour in a shell 'ole," he explained, "'oping for the best and according to orders."

"Get out then." He gave the Colonel the message, timed 9.50. "Nothing new, sir." Half an hour later news began to trickle in of a German attack on the right. A gunner subaltern from the offending battery came over to apologise. He rubbed his fair head and said: "We get nothing but bad luck nowadays. You remember the Boche postman we always chased up the road at Ransart, dropping stuff all round him? Well, we accidentally killed him the morning before we left. We were all fed to the

teeth about it." He had a drink from Nat's flask and went away. After he had gone, Sykes came in. He asked for news.

"There is no bloody news," Nat said irritably. "There's the usual war."

The boy opened his eyes. "All right." He sat down. "Rotten time they gave your father in the papers last week. My governor says your uncle asked him, in a club, as a favour to himself, not to press for an inquiry."

"An inquiry into what?"

"Into *your* governor's conduct in 1914, of course. Mine says your uncle himself is convinced that his brother couldn't face an inquiry."

Nat controlled himself. His head ached and he felt that his eyes were starting out of their sockets. I must hold my tongue, he said to himself. He began to think about Sykes's words. If Daniel was talking like that in clubs, it accounted for most of the bitterness against his father. It was treachery. I'll go home and kill the—, he thought. He stared gloomily at Sykes. "This bloody noise," he murmured. "That's a lie, of course." He turned out and went round the support line. The men, tired out after a fortnight of hazard, were standing to. Sergeant Thomas spoke to him. "Kitten come in the trench, sir."

"What?"

"Kitten. Fell in over the top an hour ago." Under Nat's incredulous eyes he unbuttoned his coat and disclosed a furry nose and pink active tongue. The area round the trench had been fought over for a fortnight, and no creature could have survived. Yet there it was. "Give it 'alf a tin of condensed, sir. 'Ark to it. Purring its stinking little 'eart out." Nat moved on. Near the station he was almost caught, and lay in a shell hole. Hoping for the best and according to orders. The men were all good boys, anonymous heroes. Those who survived this would disappear into the obscure welter from which, at a signal given,

they had emerged. Christ on the cross died a man, whether he lived a God or not. So much was clear.

The noise of firing gradually ceased, and at three o'clock word came in that the Germans were running back like hell. Everyone's spirits rose. Later a message was handed in timed 1.15. The Fusiliers in front has beaten off the attack, but C company in support had caught the worst part of the bombardment, and Perry Smith was dead, scythed in half by a piece of steel. Nat's heart turned over in his body and he said nothing. The Bloody Child made an inconsequential sound, like a baby trying not to cry. Nat began a letter to Denny. He found that he was telling her about Perry Smith, though she disliked "gloom." "Everyone liked him. He was fearless and yet knew what fear was. He was kind, one of those people who draw affection. He looked after his men." And then the restored quiet was broken by a terrific uproar. A shell and the company quartermaster sergeant arrived together, one inside and one out. Q. M. S. Foley was frightened out of his fat wits and could not speak. Nat burst into a shout of laughter. He laughed until the tears came into his eyes. Foley found his breath at the bottom of his stomach. "You ought to put up a notice about them shells, sir," he said earnestly. "Either that or inhabit somewhere safer." He had come from the transport line with letters. There was one for Nat from his father and another from Ann. Nothing from Denny. Her letters (she hated writing) were brief and infrequent. He read Ann's first.

"Darling Nat, how are you? I've got through the exam and I'm going up to Oxford. I thought I might as well since Fanny won't let me do war work. Besides, you said I ought to acquire an educated outlook. Was that what you were doing on the roof of Trinity? Will you come down and see me when you get leave? If your wife can spare you. We saw her the other eve-

ning dining with your elegant friend George Savill. She is very pretty and I am not surprised you married her. Fanny says you are not to be startled if you hear a piece of news about Daniel. I daresay you know what it is. We are very political now, dinners every night, Daniel fascinating all his guests and working very hard. You know, I really do like him. He is so patient with Fanny, and he has an absurd Fourth Form sense of humour you miss unless you live with him. Last night he imitated for Fanny and me Edward Grey imitating a bird. It was truly funny and he as pleased as a little boy when we laughed. He is very anxious for someone to capture Jerusalem, and presses it on everybody, War Office, Cabinet, and even Lord Northcliffe, who came here alone and promised uncle Daniel in front of us to get Coyle-Read out of your father's old job. But not for your father, for Daniel. Daniel says the Ministry of I.I. will lose or win the war. He means to win it himself, of course. What do you want for a Christmas present, my lovely one? I've saved five pounds for it, so don't hesitate on the score of expense. I ask every soldier who comes to the house to tell me what it is like over there, so that I can imagine you, but it's not much use. I go to see your mother and she talks about you. You must have been an adorable little boy. If this war would only end tonight, Nat. I feel so small and worthless beside you. Be very careful. You don't *need* a V.C. and I need you more than it would be suitable for me to say. Your loving cousin (by marriage) Ann."

Nat put the letter in his pocket book. The quiet outside was deepening. A blessed feeling of peace and well-being had succeeded to the strain of the day. It was partly fatigue, and partly the knowledge, sprung from he knew not where, that no moment in a peace-time future would be so sharply real to him as these moments in uncomfortable dugouts, with the

Colonel's quiet voice reading the orders, the maps spread out on the table, and the subdued sounds of the men coming in from outside. He shut his eyes.

Half an hour before dusk the barrage began again. Nat had gone into a communication trench running back down the hill. It was not in use, and he was alone in it. He heard a five-nine coming and stooped under the traverse. A second later the round earth turned over on him. The shell had hit the traverse, and the boy was buried up to his neck, arms in the ground. The shock did not numb him. As he lifted his head he *knew* he was held there to be killed. "You never hear the shell that hits you." The noise of the barrage assaulted his exposed head with the pricking of innumerable knives. A Boche aeroplane appeared, flying fairly low. *He tried to duck his head.*

He had been fast there for no more than ten minutes when the Bloody Child found him. They dug him out. He was unscratched and seemed unhurt, but he could not stand. The antics of his knees were very amusing and drew tears of laughter from his own eyes. He was quite unaware that he screamed when a shell dropped on the roof of the dugout. It was out of the question to get him away, because the road was heavily shelled, so they put him to bed on the floor of the dug-out. The Bloody Child sat beside him and held his hand. Between the shells he spoke to Nat in a crooning voice. "You have beautiful manners. Oh yes, you have, and you know more horrible and blasphemous words than anyone in the division. Quarter says so and he ought to know. I do what I can but I haven't your sheer virtuosity. There, my precious, keep still."

The barrage stopped by the timetable. Nat dropped asleep, still holding to the Bloody Child's hand, who fell forward and slept with his head on Nat's knees. All night it was quiet. Nat woke before dawn, restored. He refused to go down, and the

next day the battalion was relieved according to promise. They moved off at midnight, and morning found them at Maillet-Mailly, with the sun coming up. The sergeant's kitten was put down to stretch its legs. A boy laughed.

CHAPTER VIII

IN July 1917 Nat got three weeks leave, the longest he had ever had. He had been very slightly gassed and for the first two or three days at home he stayed in bed, eyes streaming. During these days Emily's aversion to his wife assumed the formidable aspect of a mania. The girl had not, in the eyes of Nat's mother, improved in marriage. She spent many hours each day in communication with her beauty, brushing her burnished hair until it shone, polishing her nails, practising gestures, trying frocks. To be sure, she cost Emily less, since she dined out more often than not, with George Savill or with Mr. John Clifford, who, surprising Emily, had turned out to be a not unattractive elderly gentleman, a friend in his middle years of George Moore and Solly Joel, and an incorrigible understander of pretty married women. It was difficult to believe that he had seriously meant to marry anyone. He had been told too much about too many husbands.

Why did Emily stay on in the little Chelsea flat? She might have gone, leaving the field to Denny. There were two reasons. The first she never examined, since it belonged to the unspoken bitterness with which she had seen her disgraced James leave her for Saints Rew. She ought to have been hardened to such blows by now, but in fact she was not. The second was Nat. She wanted to save his money for him. He had arranged his account with Messrs. Cox (surely the only bank in sober history whose clients made a habit of closing their accounts by falling out of aeroplanes, by getting blown up, cut in half,

poisoned by gas, and by dying of wounds, enteric, dysentery, and exposure) so that Denny could draw on it as she wished. Emily knew that if she left, her place would immediately be filled by a housekeeper, to eat Nat's food and spend his money. She hung on grimly, eating hardly anything and trying by every conceivable dodge to circumvent Denny's healthy appetite. She pored over those unsatisfying little books published during the war to combat the lusts of the flesh, proving that a sufficient number of calories and proteids can be extracted from an insufficient quantity of food. She would add up the calories (she had not the least idea what these were and thought of them as active, mysterious, and probably indelicate) in each of Denny's meals and explain triumphantly to that still hungry young woman that she was actually overfed. She became immensely clever at providing food that gave the maximum of fullness at the minimum cost. Sometimes she consulted Fanny, who would anxiously suggest strange varieties of porridge that blew Denny out suddenly and then treacherously vanished, leaving a gaping vacuum behind, to be filled with biscuits under Emily's agonised gaze, and yet stranger tricks of suggestion, such as chewing each mouthful until the aching jaw suffered—and transmitted to the stomach—all the sensations of having eaten a huge meal, or repeating under the breath (strange twentieth-century grace after meat): "I am full, I am full." All these dodges failed completely with Denny, since they presupposed faith in their efficacy, and Denny knew too well that nothing feels like a hearty meal except a hearty meal. She continued to eat everything in sight, ignoring Fanny's loyal hints, the appeals of the daily press to her patriotism ("Weigh Your Food"), and Emily's funny and not unpathetic attempts to distract her at mealtimes so that she should forget the cheese and biscuits left discreetly in the cupboard.

"The foundation of a good complexion is a healthy body,"

she observed. "Besides I enjoy good food. John says that few women have my palate."

Emily kept a secret purse, adding to it shilling by shilling for Nat's next leave. Also she hid little things in her room, behind the large plaster image of the Virgin Mary that stood on a shelf above her bed. One of the things she had entrusted to Her care ("Being a mother Yourself," she said apologetically) was a small pot of Strawberry jam from Saints Rew. It was last year's vintage, since James had this year sold the strawberries to repair a damaged oriel. So on Nat's second day in bed Emily took the little jar from its hiding-place, put it on Nat's tray and under Denny's eyes carried it herself into the boy's room. Afterwards she sat smiling at tea with Denny, eating dry toast and thinking of Nat. Shortly Denny seized the teapot and stood up. "I'll just see whether Nat wants anything," she murmured.

Well, the girl is improving, Emily thought warmly, surprised and pleased by this most unusual thoughtfulness. She ought to have expected what followed, but she did not, and the shock of seeing Denny come back carrying the little pot of jam unnerved her. She sat in silence while the girl all but emptied it. Strange that so much bitterness could be contained in one little jar of jam.

She had more to suffer. The hypocritical care with which she cooked for Denny was replaced, when the boy came home, by a loving extravagance. Eggs, sent from the village, borrowed (a euphemism they both respected) from Fanny, coaxed from shopkeepers, went to make cakes, nogs, and omelettes for him. One evening she made an omelette that she knew was perfect. She would never make a better. It was her masterpiece. She decided not to eat any of it, and divided it into three pieces, one she gave Nat, one (scrupulously equal) to

Denny, and the third she left on the dish—for the boy, when he was ready. He finished his share rapidly.

“Are you sure you don’t want any, darling?”

“No. It’s for you.” Emily trembled a little.

Nat was lifting it from the dish when Denny held out her plate.

“Half, please,” she said, jocund and hearty.

“Sorry, child.” Nat gave her the larger part. She ate it with relish and God failed to strike her dead at Emily’s feet.

“Our dear little mother does like cooking for *the boy*,” she remarked languidly. “When she says ‘the boy’ her voice changes.”

Emily felt exposed. Burning with indignation, she cleared the table, and Nat took Denny off to a theatre. Emily heard them returning at midnight, in a taxi. When Denny had shut herself in their bedroom, she slipped out of bed, and dragging on her shabby dressing-gown, went in search of Nat. He was lying wearily in a chair in the sitting-room, lighting a cigarette.

“Nat,” his mother began, “why do you always bring Denny home in a taxi? Surely you can’t afford it.”

Nat clasped his hands round his knees and said seriously: “But mother, she *must* have a taxi. She’s not really used to walking or to ‘buses.” He sounded shocked.

“Oh darling,” Emily began desperately and stopped. It was no use. Nat having let himself be persuaded that old Sadgrove’s daughter had been delicately used, what could an ill-favoured old woman do in remonstrance except convict herself of indelicacy and jealousy? She held her tongue and listened while the boy talked. He told her about men, friends of his, he made her laugh and once or twice he shocked and horrified her. She had not heard him talk so gaily since he came home, and realised in a flash that Denny did not encourage stories of the war. He came alive under his mother’s eyes. The little

room filled with men, some living and some dead, and all closer to him than she was; and all knew more about her son than she did. She studied him, as he talked, with a passionate care. He had gone into the war a dreaming boy. War had given him a reality so vivid that all his life after would less content him. He sat huddled in his chair, tense, smiling, cruelly alive. Once he asked her if she were bored. She shook her head and he went on talking. He drew a map on the hearthrug to make a story clear to her and dragged her about France and Flanders, funnily impatient when she stumbled. Now and again he drew a sharp breath and forgot her altogether. She waited humbly, within sound of the guns, pushing at the wisps of her hair, to be remembered.

In the middle of it all a bell rang. Startled, Nat went to the front door. There was no one. He came back. Again the bell rang. This time mother and son realised together that it was Denny's bell. Nat hurried away. Emily heard him say: "All right, darling. I'm dreadfully sorry." He was blushing faintly when he came back. "I must go."

"Was she—ringing for you to come to bed?"

Nat stiffened. "Yes. Good-night, my dear."

"Wives were better bred in my young days," his mother said.

"Darling, you know you were afraid of your husband," Nat said mischievously. He bent to kiss her and she flung herself into his arms.

"Oh, my baby, my dear, you oughtn't to let her order you about."

"Good-night." He blew her a kiss from the door, still smiling, and went. She heard his soft voice talking on and on, soothingly, to Denny. . . .

"I think," Emily told Fanny, "I could bear anything if she would not call me Dear little mother."

Fanny smothered a laugh. "She told me when they came here yesterday that the best judges had praised her brain."

Drawing her chair close to Fanny's bed, Emily began a shameless recital of Denny's crimes. Heads together, the two old friends discussed the habits and manners of this devastating new creature. Neither her youth nor her young charm moved them to pity. At the end of it, feeling relieved and slightly ashamed, Emily went back to Chelsea, resolved to think better of her son's wife, now that she had said the worst. Denny came in to tea radiant, carrying a small basket of strawberries.

"Look, mother."

"They must have cost a great deal," Emily ventured.

"Ten shillings."

"There can't be more than ten," Emily said. "Why do you spend Nat's money so recklessly?"

Denny pouted, not ungracefully. "But I bought them for Nat, mother."

After that, Emily was not surprised to see her eat them all herself, while Nat looked on with adoring eyes. She held out the last one to him. The boy shook his head. "You have it, ducky," he said.

Hesitating briefly, Denny had it.

Emily slipped away. She decided, feeling certain that Denny would stay where she was for half-an-hour, to look through Nat's store of shirts and socks. Nat came into his bedroom to find her regarding with a puzzled frown the contents of a drawer—one khaki shirt and two pairs of socks.

"Nat, where are the rest of your things?"

"What do you mean, the rest?" Nat demanded. "I've got my other shirt on, but I think there is a pair of socks somewhere to be mended."

Emily looked at him in a stupefied way. "Your *other* shirt. Nat! Do you go to the front with only two shirts?"

"The best people at the front wear them one at a time," he said gravely.

His mother buried her face clumsily in the shirt she was holding. He thought she was crying and tried to make sure. But she pushed him away and stood up, dry-eyed, with flaming cheeks. "I can't bear it any longer," Emily Grimshaw said. "I can't. I could forgive her the little pot of jam and the strawberries, and the taxis she makes you take for her, a strong well-nourished young woman, but I'll never forgive her for letting my son go to the war with two shirts. I asked her about buying some with your money and she said you had all you needed—"

"I have," Nat interrupted quietly.

"—and bought herself hats, and blouses from Bradley's, and hats and hats. All the time you're away she is out with other men. I feed her and Fanny feeds her and she does nothing, and lets you risk your life in rags. Oh, Nat. Oh, it's all too dreadful. I can't *bear* it."

Nat stood looking at his mother. His face was blanched and lined. Her bitterness turned and twisted in him, until the pain suffocated him. He pressed the fingers of both hands against his thin young stomach.

"Don't, darling."

But she went on, unable to stop, until there was nothing more she could say. Then she sat on the edge of his bed and rocked herself to and fro, a forlorn little old woman, conscious of defeat. Nat tried to think of something to comfort her and himself. He thought: I can't stand any more.

"I didn't know you felt like that about Denny," he said finally. "She's my wife, and I love her. I couldn't let you talk like that again."

Emily said quietly: "I'll go back to Saints Rew now. I've been a silly wicked old woman. You'll have to get her a house-keeper. It will cost you more but that can't be helped."

"I shall be drawing a major's pay next month," Nat said. "I can afford it."

"I'll send you some shirts and socks."

"No. Don't."

"I must." She frowned, calculating silently. She was trying to fill up, with six khaki shirts and twelve pairs of socks, the pit that had opened at her feet. When she saw that Nat was looking at her with the face of a bewildered little boy, she smiled at him, as she had always smiled over his boyish perplexities, not clever enough to solve them for him and too wise to pretend that they were not real.

"Oh, darling," she sighed, "I don't mind anything if you're happy. . . ."

Emily went back to Saints Rew the next day. As she got out of the express at Andover, to take the local train, she recalled the many times she had stood there waiting for Nat, coming from school at the beginning of holidays. . . . He flung himself out of the train, a compact little boy, hair on end and eyes shining. "Mother. Are we going on in the carriage? Is my pony all right? Darling. . . ." Her train slid through low-lying meadows, with a clear stream bending the reeds in its bed. Emily began to feel comforted. She could remember that the first thing she had ever noticed was the touch of the long grass on the edge of the lawn at her home, and now again, as she grew old, fields and trees and running water were taking the place of human caresses. At the station, James was waiting for her with the carriage. "My dear," he said gently, "you have been a long time coming." He looked frail and bright-eyed. Emily thought anxiously that she had stayed away too long. If James had died, she would have nothing now. . . .

A day or two after, Nat went to hear his uncle speak at the opening of a new club for soldiers and sailors. Daniel Grimshaw had succeeded Coyle-Read at the Ministry of International Intelligence on December the sixth. The Bloody Child, on leave at the time, saw the old Yorkshireman in Pall Mall on the afternoon of his defeat, with tears in his eyes. He said it was not unmoving.

Daniel stood on a small platform draped with flags. He was the only cool person in the room. The heat of the day and the whiffs of air drifting in from narrow malodorous streets made the crowded room intolerable. Nat edged backwards to the door. From there he listened to his uncle exhorting England to hate her enemies. The room was filled with fresh-faced boys who had not seen the trenches and wounded men who had. These shuffled their feet and wiped the skin inside their collars. He spoke of the fallen as if hate outlived the shrinking flesh and the young ghosts jostling each other along the roads behind the battlefields were still fighting their hereditary foes. Nat had seen a good many men die and none of them had gone out of life hating either the German who pushed him off into the unknown or the statesman who had brought him to this pass, nor even the general whose incompetence had forced him to die uselessly in an enterprise doomed before it began. The faces of the dead were not malignant. They were shocked, horrified, wrenched with agony, or utterly indifferent. He recalled those of his friends who had died, Perry Smith, who was kind to everything alive, Charles Dumain, the young surgeon who was only afraid of losing one of the hands with which he helped to operate on a German prisoner seized with acute pains, and Philip Leslie, with his boyish love of dances, honey, tall books, and girls with brown eyes. Any of these, if they could have spoken, would have called Daniel a liar, and laughed at him. The longer he listened to his uncle, lying in

the name of these dead men, his friends, the angrier Nat grew. He recalled with a frightful clarity the first casualty in his company, the very young sergeant brought back from the raid, a stretcher case, grey-faced and shapeless. Answering some flicker of the eyes from which the light was withdrawing, Nat lit a cigarette and put it between the ashen lips, from which it fell at once on a faint sigh and the boy was dead. Daniel's words mocked that sigh, they made death foolish and heroism a blunder. When he said: "In the name of the fallen, I open this club to you, their comrades and avengers," Nat let drop one word. It was French and unprintable, and all that could be desired by Perry Smith, Dumain, and Leslie who was the youngest of all of them.

The speech over, the Minister got down from the platform and moved about among the men, talking. He had developed, professionally, a charm, a trick of fascination. He used it now, asking questions and shaking hands, his eyes twinkling, his arrogant face eager and alive. Once or twice his voice faltered in speaking to the poor battered remains of a man. Nat thought that, like Wellington, Daniel would have shut himself up to weep after Waterloo, full of honourable grief for what he had done. He made his way towards Nat, who put his hands hastily in his pockets.

"My God, it's hot," his uncle said. "Will you dine with us tonight? Your aunt sees too little of you."

"My father is coming to town for the night," Nat said. "I shall be dining with him."

Daniel nodded. "Your father would do well not to come to town so often. The sight of him in their clubs reminds people."

"If it reminded them what they owe to him!" Nat said hotly.

Daniel smiled. "Try to persuade him," he answered. He went

away, leaving Nat with the knowledge that for some reason he had not yet discovered, Daniel disliked his twin brother and would not be sorry to see him broken.

Walking along Piccadilly to his club, he saw Daniel on the other side of the street. He was standing under the colonnade of the Ritz, talking to a young woman whom Nat did not know. She was looking up at Daniel with an air at once provocative and friendly. The sight startled Nat. What would have seemed ordinary and unimportant in any other man of his acquaintance was extraordinary in Daniel, who had no friends among women. Fanny was his friend, listening to him—when not in one of her moods—with a patience and a nimble wit that had helped him through all the crises of his career, from the moment when he was drawn irresistibly out of the shady places of industry into the blaze of politics, to the crowning moment when he succeeded Coyle-Read. At whatever hour of the night he came in, he went to Fanny's room and without turning on the light told her whom he had seen and how he had spent his hours in the world from which she was cut off. If he was very tired he knelt beside her bed, with his forehead on her knees, not talking, for a long time. She was never in a mood at these times, never asleep, never anything but his gentle lovely Fanny.

Nat hurried on, ashamed of the impulse that had halted him under the wall of Devonshire House. He saw Daniel lift his stick at a taxi. He helped the young woman in, and followed her, and the taxi moved off westwards in the stream of traffic.

Three hours later he went to meet his father at Waterloo. To his surprise James insisted on going to St. James's Place to see his brother. On the way he told Nat how cleverly and from the purest motives Daniel had fostered intrigues against his predecessor in office. Coyle-Read was said to have misled the public, to have lost the confidence of the War Council, to have

delayed its decisions by his slow and tortuous methods. So he went, blown up by the sudden emergence of Daniel, like the devil through the trap-door, breathing rage and efficiency and speed and *jusqu'à boutisme*. And very soon after an envoy arrived from the Emperor of Austria, offering peace. He got short shrift, and Daniel—just settled in his seat—breathed relief that his career as a war minister had not been cut short at the take-off.

"It is not unlikely," James remarked, "that no such opportunity to write his name in history will come again in our lifetime. They say now that Time is history. There is nothing but Time and nothing but history, no past, no future, and no present, just Time; so you see, my dear, Loos and Thermopylæ were both fought yesterday and if you are killed tomorrow it is merely an historical incident and needn't trouble you in any way."

Daniel was dressing to go out. He asked them into his bedroom and Nat was surprised by its carpetless floor and cheap enamelled furniture. It was like a hospital, or one of those strange and alarming laboratories where minds are hunted down and machines record the difference in weight between the truth and a lie. James sat down on the edge of the bed. It was a high one and his legs dangled. Daniel spoke very severely about a disgraced general. He said the fellow had been asking for it and by George he had got it.

"I came to tell you," James said, swinging his legs, "that I am giving up my tenth share in the firm of Grimshaw and Grimshaw."

Daniel grimaced into a small glass fixed to the wall. "You're what?"

James explained apologetically that he disliked drawing profits from poison gas.

"I'll buy you out," Daniel said.

"You don't understand me," James said humbly. "My fault. I'm trying to get rid of the money."

Daniel turned round. "Do you object to your German friends using poison gas or only to our fighting them with their own weapons? What the devil are you going to live on? You can't keep up Saints Rew on your pension. I suppose you know you've been starving your wife for years. By the way, I heard it suggested the other day that you ought to be struck off the pensions list."

"For disservices rendered?" James asked mildly. "Surely as your brother——?"

"You're a fool," Daniel said violently. How well he had brought himself up in his public part of modern crusader. It was the first time anyone had seen him in an undignified rage. "If you do this publicly, I'll repudiate you. I won't be tarred with your brush."

"Is that why you have been saying in your clubs that my father could not face an inquiry?" Nat asked politely.

"Nat!" His father sounded amused.

"You're mad," Daniel said, calm and twinkling. "You'd better ask your father why he has turned Saints Rew into a refuge for German spies. And why he was holding private conferences with Germans in the very last days of peace."

James slid off the bed. He stood looking down at the floor, seemingly very tired. "Saints Rew won't suffer," he muttered. He looked up at his brother. "Goodbye, Daniel." At the door he stopped, his hand on Nat's arm. "Do tell me whether you kept on Miss Smith."

"I did not," Daniel said testily. "She was damned ugly and not too clean."

James reflected. "I hadn't noticed it," he murmured, "but I daresay you're right. What a pity!" He sighed and shut the door gently on himself and Nat. Outside the house he stood

looking up and down St. James's Street. Nat said furiously: "I'd like to smash his elegant jaw."

James laughed gaily. "What fun! But what a shame."

"Why does he hate you, sir?"

"He doesn't," James said promptly. "When we were little fellows at school he used to egg other boys on secretly to bully me, and then he would descend on them in a fury of vengeance, effect a splendid rescue at some cost to himself, and carry me off to be comforted. He dried my tears. He even gave me his pocket-money to console me. He was tireless, he couldn't save me often enough." He paused and added comically: "One might suppose that with England to save, he would despise such small game as me."

They halted in Piccadilly. In the darkening and darkened road taxis and cars dodged between slow-moving 'buses. Soldiers on leave, civilians, women in evening cloaks, pretty Jewesses with tight little behinds, elegant old beaus, and poor battered wrecks looking to the gutter for cigar butts and the invisible skies for a windfall, shifted about the pavements. A suppressed excitement, unseen like a fever in the blood, possessed them. They talked faster, laughed louder, jostled each other more than a pre-war crowd. A celestial observer would have been puzzled to find any connection between the activity of these figures and the activity of those other figures in another very different area not far off, long lines of men moving slowly along muddy roads, standing in ditches cut in the ground, lying out in preposterous attitudes on the bare earth, or fallen, slimy-eyed and unspeakable, into holes. Yet there was a connection, and a direct one. Perhaps it was transmitted through the earth itself, too used to violence and groans, or perhaps it was merely the smell of blood in the air.

James said: "Is your wife dining with us?"

Nat shook his head. He frowned, unable to get said that she

was going to a theatre with George Savill. During this leave, he had been a little surprised to discover how intimate George and Denny had become. He did not mind telling his father where she was now, but he could not bear to put into words his own reluctance to meet George. He had lunched with him once, and found nothing to say. The Duchess did all the talking. He told Nat that there was an old gentleman in the F.O. whom no one had been able to persuade that America had come into the war. Even when they showed him a real American soldier he merely tittered. He said it was another of Lloyd George's Welsh tricks and less likely than the story of Russian legions in England.

Nat laughed and furtively studied the Duchess, who was looking tired; his handsome self-assured face had lost its high colour. The charm still worked. Nat felt it warming his heart as he listened. And yet he could not talk to his friend. Words and phrases stuck in his throat. He felt more at home with any of "those tattered and contemptible regiments that will die at the command of a Sergeant." He tried desperately to get back the loving ease of Oxford. No use. The guns had drowned the sound of water sliding between bright meadows. And that he had forgotten how the moonlight lay on Tom Quad he was made embarrassingly aware. The Duchess was publishing a book of verse from which he read Nat a poem called *Two Moons*, being the emotions of a young subaltern on seeing the moon rise in Flanders and remembering Magdalen tower in moonlight. Nat laughed tactlessly.

"You ought to hear Sergeant Thomas on the moon," he said. "*Oh like the bleeding thing away; look at it, I ask yer. I got to get a working party out. If I 'ear anyone else 'umming Mister Moon I'll cut is 'eart out, I will.*"

"Not quite my school of poetry," the Duchess said smoothly. "Try Sassoon." . . .

He left James at his club about midnight and walked to Chel-

sea. Denny had not come home, and Nat fell asleep on the couch waiting for her. He woke when she kissed his cheek and half sat up in her arms.

"But it's getting light," he said in a sleepy startled voice.

Denny held him closer. "We drove round Richmond Park after the show." She shook her hair so that a coil of it fell across his face. Her mouth shut his. "Pretend it's still night," she whispered. "Nat. Kiss me. Now, quickly. Nat. Oh, Nat." The boy's arms tightened round her. His heart began to beat furiously, shaking his slight body, and he freed a hand to stroke her and to take up a handful of her hair. The pain of loving grew intolerable. He took her face between his hands and leaned dizzily over her.

CHAPTER IX

ON the last evening of Nat's leave he and Denny dined with one of James Grimshaw's former colleagues. Frederick Raphael was a middle-aged Jew, of an old and not undistinguished family. Distinguished, that is to say, in science, music, and politics. It contained no financier who juggled with a nation's supply of wheat, no captain of industry engaged in standardising the world's output so that chairs, goblets, tables, chests of drawers, are not longer signed by their makers, no newspaper proprietors, not even a theatrical manager. It had never occurred to him that to continue to like and befriend James was bad policy, and when the Christian charity of others among James's friends led them to warn Raphael he was polite but obtuse. He went down to see James at Saints Rew, taking with him the fellow of a piece of Chinese pottery in the Lacquer Room. He said the two ought not to have been separated.

He and his wife were lonely people. A certain grave singleness of mind and an almost unearthly delicacy of spirit marked them out for solitude. Like James, Raphael had a profound knowledge of Europe. It came to him along trade routes that were already old when the Holy Roman Empire was young. It was his blood, not his mind, that instructed him. The melancholy of his face meant nothing, however. If he had had children, he would have been perfectly happy. He was nearly that without them, since his wife Esther had been mother, sister, wife, and child to him ever since he married her, when she was sixteen and he four years older. All his racial passion for the family

was bound up in her. She was to him every kind and friendly thing.

The Raphaels have no place in this story. Nat never saw them again after their dinner party, which he did not enjoy. He did not, in fact, see Esther Raphael, who had been taken dangerously ill in the afternoon. Her guests did not know it. They were a mixed lot, politicians, political hostesses, one or two knowing young men from the Foreign Office, some young women for whom the war was making reputable an old form of feminine self-expression, a writer or two, all of them brought together less by Raphael's indifferent desire than by their need to gather in lighted rooms and find in company, in talking to one another, in seeing themselves reflected in a neighbour's eyes, a self-importance they lost when they undressed at night and stood without a phrase or a witticism to cover their nakedness. Near Nat was a Cabinet Minister talking very coyly about the state of Europe, as if Europe were a lady of doubtful virtue, with whom it rather flattered his vanity to claim acquaintance, discreetly, as one man of the world to another. On the other side of the table was his cousin Ann, who gave him a radiant smile. Daniel was not far from her. Nat's immediate neighbours were a handsome slender woman of no ascertainable age and an American diplomat on a mission. He rather thought the young man on Ann's left was an American. This young man was clearly shaken by Ann's beauty and ignored the rest of the company altogether.

At what moment in the past three years and in what way Ann had become beautiful baffled Nat. She would never be anything but small and thin. Her mouth was too wide, the line of her face too square. Her eyes were grey and abnormally large. No single feature in her face was even very good. Yet there she sat, delicately and burningly lovely, smiling up at her neighbour in a

way that annoyed Nat profoundly. She did not seem to be talking at all.

He could hear his uncle's voice very clearly.

"We counted," Daniel was saying, "on a loss of a hundred thousand men a month. As a matter of fact, we've lost less than half that number in the last three weeks. Not so bad."

The very elegant person on Nat's left leaned forward. "You ought to stiffen up the tribunals," she murmured. "The working-classes at home think of nothing but over-eating and enjoyment. At the end of the war they'll be thoroughly out of hand. You should see the sour looks and black faces of my husband's miners."

"You don't train 'em right," the American diplomat remarked. "We're working out a regular system on our recruits. Going to apply it to everyone after the war. Idea's this. There's no such thing as an unregulated act. Everything's behaviour. Get 'em young, measure up their reactions, and train 'em so they know how to do one thing and do it well, if it's only tapping a nail. You got to start in the cot. Give 'em habits. Once they've gotten habits they can't break away. Only you got to choose their habits. It's been proved on mice. Rats don't act so well."

"Possibly men might prove even more difficult than rats," Nat murmured.

"It's behaviour," the American repeated earnestly and kindly. "Everything's behaviour. There isn't anything else. I'll lay you'd agree if you had the employing of fifty thousand men."

"You did say men, not mice?" Nat asked politely. The other ignored him, and leaning back, Nat looked round the table. Denny and George Savill were lost in each other's talk and Nat wondered flippantly what awful problem they were discussing. Was George reciting one of his poems to her? A manservant came up to Raphael and spoke in his ear. Raphael nodded and

the man went out of the room. A few moments later a series of muffled thuds made itself heard above the conversation. One or two of the talkers paused and went on with raised voices. Presently Raphael said: "There is a fire in the kitchens. I am afraid it may dislocate dinner a little. I am so sorry."

Not all his guests heard him. Easby, the editor of London's most respected newspaper, leaned forward to speak to Nat. Easby is a clumsy-looking fellow, who runs about Europe with a mind so conscientiously open that it has become a vast mausoleum of dead impressions. If he had been born south of the equator he would have been a crack head hunter. "I have asked your father to write his memoirs, but he refuses."

"He doesn't believe in memoirs, sir."

"A great pity. No one knows so much about the undertow of foreign politics as your father. I went down to Hampshire to see him as soon as he left the I.I. I never go near a Minister in power, but when a man I respect is in disgrace I go straight to him and stand by him until he's through."

"You don't look like a vulture, sir," Nat said mildly.

"Eh? What? I like your father. I was at dinner with him once at your uncle's house in St. James's Place, just the three of us round a little table, when someone came in with the news that Winston Churchill wanted to call out the Guards against some wretched strikers or other. Your uncle got very hot in favour of the firm hand policy. James Grimshaw, looking small and boyish, said sweetly: 'Mr. Churchill has returned, like the gospel dog, to his vomit.' It silenced your uncle."

"I beg your pardon," Nat said.

"Eh?"

"I misunderstood you just now."

The Cabinet Minister, growing momently more arch, had begun a regular dissertation on French politics. "What one so envies," he exclaimed, "is the delicious candour of the French

press. Can you imagine in any English newspaper a leader on a respected member of the War Council beginning *Ce vieux souteneur?* That sort of thing clears the air."

"It's not candour," Daniel said gloomily. "It's hysteria. The French are a nation of precocious children."

"Political-minded peasants," Raphael murmured. "The most persistent race on the earth. Except my own."

The lights went out suddenly, and he added gently: "We'll have candles."

"They're just pure extroverts," put in a soothing voice on Nat's right. "They've gotten a kind of sexual neurosis. You can alter all that through habits. I'm going to see old man Clemenceau next week by appointment and put it to him that behaviour is the salvation of the world. I have a feeling he's going to see it my way. We've gotten a little song for our Young Behaviourists' League." He tapped gently on the table with a fork.

"'Imitate the Saviour, Co-relate behaviour, and the old world shall be new.' When I've settled it up with the old men I'm going to take a look at the boys in the trenches."

"I shouldn't if I were you. The trenches are full of rats, all extroverts."

Candles were springing up down the length of the table. They stood in little groups, like young flowers growing out of glass or silver stems. Nat found Ann's eyes fixed on him. He smiled at her, and glanced quickly towards Denny and George Savill. They were still engrossed and he rather suspected that they had been sitting hand in hand. He could have been savagely angry; the candles danced before his eyes. He pressed his mouth tightly shut and listened to the voices of his fellow guests. They were excited, and Nat's lovely neighbour had gone off into a fit of modulated laughter at the conclusion of a story. "Archie said: 'If you tell them the truth you'll lose your job and if you don't

you'll lose the war.' Everybody shouted with laughter and he just put on his little hat and walked out."

"Dear Archie."

"... pure co-ordination of the conditioned reflexes. It's been proved up on mice. And orphans."

"They're all mad," Nat said to himself. Through a half-open door at the far side of the room he caught a brief glimpse of a man with a blackened face, bleeding from a cut over one eye. He glanced at his host. Raphael's face between two candles was empty of everything but a faint expectation. Whatever he listened to, it was not to his guests. He had long since left the table though his body continued to press its shoulders against the panelled wall behind his chair. Of all races on earth the Jews have kept closest acquaintance with the old dark cruel gods, the shadows flung by man's journeying sun and at their longest past the meridian. And so they heap up possessions, money, pictures, music, barriers against nothingness. Raphael's barrier was his wife. Because she wished it, he had not put these people off, but now he felt that he must get rid of them quickly. Esther was going to die. He knew it. He felt her dying out of him. And it was not because he and she were husband and wife, a man and a woman who had been in love, that when she died he would have nothing. That narrow relationship between them was nothing. It was she who made his world intelligent and friendly, and without friendship and intelligence, life, with its infinite variety, was over.

Nat's attention wandered. He had drunk rather too much and he became involved in an argument with the bland American on his right that presently spread to the other one, Ann's neighbour. Nat's head felt remarkably clear and he talked them both down with good-tempered arrogance. Affectionately, he patted the plump hand near his own. "Funny old mouse-fancier," he said. The hand was withdrawn. "You don't understand the Eng-

lish," he said sadly. "No American ever does. We're the salt of the earth but we *don't talk about it*."

Some time later he found himself, sober and less talkative, waiting for Denny at the foot of the staircase. Ann appeared first, followed by her admirer. She came up to Nat and whispered: "Daniel can't take me home. You take me. I can't get rid of him."

"Of course." Nat drew her arm into his and said pleasantly: "Goodbye, sir. We may meet again. Perhaps you're thinking of taking a look at our war too? Anything I can do——"

"I've been with the Canadians since 1916," the other retorted. "But I know you're a nation of heroes." He walked away.

"All those Yankee soldiers wear their clothes too tight," Nat observed to his retreating back. "It's probably a sexual neurosis."

"You've been behaving very badly, Nat."

"I know I have. I always make a fool of myself on these occasions. I wasn't co-ordinated properly in my cot. You shouldn't have smiled at the fellow." He caught a glimpse of his host on the wide landing above. Head sunk between his shoulders, Raphael was shuffling rather than walking through his departing guests. He looked dazed and was not speaking to anyone. Nat saw Denny coming towards him. At the same moment, George hurried in from the street. He spoke in Nat's ear. "What do you think of going down to Coyle-Read's house to bathe? I've got plenty of petrol. You and Denny and"—he glanced at Ann, still holding to Nat's arm—"you'll come, won't you, Miss Seller? The gardens run down to the shore and I have a standing invitation for any hour of the day or night. It's no distance really, and Polly Coyle-Read doesn't mind anything."

Nat looked contemptuous. His father had once said of Mrs. Coyle-Read that she had a brilliant mind and a vulgar soul, and

she had told a rude and untruthful story about his mother in her late complacent Memoirs.

"Nothing would persuade me to meet the woman," he said cheerfully. "And we can't call on people at this hour."

"We're not going to call. We're going to use their piece of private shore."

Denny cried: "But of course we'll go." Her face was alive with pleasure, "Don't spoil it, Nat."

The boy's smouldering resentment against her died abruptly. "Very well. We'll go. Probably the police will do all the spoiling necessary."

But no one stopped the car as it rushed, after calling at the flat and at George's rooms, towards the coast. Nat sat in the back with Ann, listening drowsily to Denny's voice murmuring on and on to George. Sometime after two o'clock the car slowed down outside a low house built at the head of a cove. A garden wall ran down to the shore and in its shadow George stopped. Some town or other lay to the right; the roofs, the downs behind, and the sea in front were all one colour, a greeny opalescence, so that it was impossible to distinguish downs from sea, and the town lay under green water like an enchantment. Nat declined to bathe; after a glance at his face, Ann declined also. George disappeared behind a shelf of rock, and Ann and Nat left Denny the car for a dressing room. They walked a little way and sat down. Suddenly Nat rolled over on his face with a groan.

"Oh God, I can't stand this, Ann. Those perfectly ghastly people at that table. The incredible vulgarity and impudence of them. Thank heaven, this time tomorrow I'll be back in France."

"My little sweet, you may get killed."

"It is better to repose in the earth betimes than to sit up late."
He knew that he was being absurd and he enjoyed it in a gloomy

way. He turned on his back and his head touched Ann's knee. She laid a cold little hand on him.

"I couldn't bear it, Nat."

The boy sat up. "Oh yes you could," he said cheerfully. "What an ass I am. . . . I hate this sneaking into other people's grounds in the middle of the night. It's vulgar." He put an arm round her thin shoulders. "Dear infant. Dear Ann."

"I'm not an infant any longer. I'm eighteen."

"When are you going to Oxford?"

"In October."

"Why are you going?"

Ann leaned lightly against him. "There seems nothing else to do. Besides—I wanted to see the place where you'd been."

"Haven't you any desires of your own?" Nat asked cruelly.

"Yes."

"What are they, then? Tell me."

Ann shook her head. Nat saw the confused unhappiness in her eyes; he did not want to think about it, and he lay down again, with his head on her knee. He was very comfortable. The warm night, the retreating murmur of the sea, made him sleepy. He could see Denny floating, supported by George. After a while they left the sea and came racing over the sandy grass. Denny stumbled and George caught her in his arm. She stood in front of Nat, pale in the moonlight, little cascades of drops rolling down her body. The boy doubled his hands under him, tortured by the desire to carry her away from all eyes but his own.

"You'll catch cold," he said.

She flung him a smile and climbed into the car. A moment later she poked her head through a window. "Please come and help me, Nat."

Nat did not stir. "I'm very comfortable here, and I should only sit on your clothes and drop your hair-pins," he said callously.

When they were ready to start back she made a move to get in beside George. Nat swung her round. "No you don't, my girl," he said. "Into the back with you. It's soaking wet where you dressed. You can just sit in it yourself."

He got in after her and drew her to him, covering her up to the shoulders with the rug. "Mustn't get cold," he murmured. His drowsiness was replaced by a growing excitement. It was not in himself, it was in the very air of this country at war and out of sight of war's abominations. He had noticed the same phenomenon in Paris, a secret spreading corruption, a loosening of controls which actual warfare tightened. Holding Denny in one aching arm, he hardly knew when lanes gave place to darkened streets. Ann got out in St. James's Place. She stood for a moment with her coat drawn round her, looking very small and plain. Her face, under the hat she had pulled down on it, was sunken. "Goodbye, Nat."

"Good-night." He felt very kindly towards his little cousin (by marriage) Ann. Her future seemed to him precarious, and he preferred to think about it as little as he could. He hated to be made uncomfortable. He hated all suggestion of melodrama and he felt that Ann was capable of the most startling single-mindedness. She had the fatal gift of generosity. Her silences—she never had anything to say—were misleading, the cover for an utter carelessness of herself that appalled Nat when he got an inkling of it. He reflected anxiously that there was every reason why she should make a mess of her life. She had no money and no background, Fanny was impossible and Daniel absorbed. Neither of them thought it odd that a wild little girl had grown, overnight, into a self-possessed young woman of eighteen. Nat was too near her own age to have thought about it himself before the glimpse he had just caught of the bewildered loneliness and funny secret little agonies of the process. It had startled him so deeply that he did not care to dwell on it.

. . . She had not even vanity to protect her. He had taken her out three times during his leave, and on each occasion she had been at the meeting-place ten minutes before time.

The car stopped again. He forgot Ann. Denny stumbled up the stone steps to the flat. "I'm tired, I'm tired," she repeated.

Inside the door the boy drew her into his arms. He kissed her fiercely, with anguish and rage and longing and a painful tenderness. He knew that she was letting George do as much. It was an infuriating thought. He held her with all the strength of his hard young arms. "You're all I have," he said, in despair. He wanted to absorb her as she had absorbed him. "You can't love anyone else. Say you can't."

"I couldn't, could I," Denny said, "and be here with you?"

"You're my wife."

Anger and misery and every other emotion left him. He stood trembling, in the quiet before ecstasy. . . .

He went back to France the next day. His mother had come up from Saints Rew, to see Fanny, she said. He asked her to come to tea. She came, and sat on the edge of her chair. She was longing to ask him whether he liked his new shirts, but the presence of Denny kept her silent. Denny's housekeeper was out, and the tea, prepared by Denny, was a scratch affair. But the girl was very affectionate and did her best to make Nat's mother feel at home. When the boy telephoned for a taxi, Emily breathed a sigh of relief. She offered to wash up the tea things. It would give her a chance to make sure that the shirts had been packed.

"You're coming to the station, aren't you, Denny?"

Denny shook her head. "I hate farewell scenes," she said languidly.

Emily's heart stood still and then began to racket about in her little body in anguish. Surely the girl must know that only

the utmost need could have made Nat ask to be seen off. She made a terrible effort.

"I never in my life before heard the boy ask anyone to see him off on a journey," she said smilingly.

Denny stretched out her hand for the last piece of bread. She said nothing. She had the air of ignoring a social lapse.

"Well, will you come, mother?"

Emily withdrew to the landing to look for her gloves. Nat said goodbye to his wife: "Goodbye, my sweet, don't miss me too much," and followed her out. He was laughing, but his face had a pinched discouraged look that hurt Emily intolerably. When they reached the bottom of the stairs the taxi had not appeared, and they set off to walk towards the rank, Nat looking up at the flat all the way past. His mother knew that he was hoping for a glimpse of Denny. The girl did not show herself. "She has gone," thought Emily viciously, "to powder her face after so much emotion."

Nat recovered his spirits long before they reached Victoria. He was very gay, and called goodbye to her casually as the train moved out. She crept off the platform. She felt numb and cold, and paused outside the tea-room to search in the moth-eaten little bag she carried everywhere with her. There were three coppers and a shilling. She went in and sat down at one of the square marble-topped tables. A girl brought her a cup of scalding tea. She sat stirring it absently. . . . She had remembered something that happened when Nat was a very little boy; he would be about three, she thought. He had been inconceivably naughty, folding his tiny mouth close and going from one crime to another. Nothing prevailed with him, neither punishment, nor reasoning, nor entreaty. "Oh, Nat, can't you be good? Just for me." So at last she had put on her hat and gone into the nursery, where he sat on the floor, solemnly dissecting a battered doll, his dear bedfellow. "I'm going away now, Nat. You've been

too wicked. I am going to stay with your aunt Fanny." Nat glanced up for a moment and then away, his lashes fluttering down over his eyes. "Love to aunt Fanny," he said carelessly. . . . "Don't miss me too much," and he laughed a little. . . . The tiny child on the nursery floor had been suffering, too. . . . Emily pushed her cup away so that the tea spilled over into the saucer. "I can't drink it," she said loudly. Clutching the little bag, she got up and walked out, rather unsteady. The girl cleared away the cup of tea. She had got used to this sort of thing during the past three years. She felt like it herself sometimes, what with the war and one thing and another.

CHAPTER x

ON Christmas Day 1918 Nat's battalion was in billets at Ransart. The celebrating of that Armistice Christmas began for Nat at two o'clock in the afternoon, with a prolonged lunch at headquarters mess. At four o'clock he set off, in company with the Colonel and the Bloody Child (now Captain Sykes no less), to call on each company mess. The frosty air and the wine he had drunk went to his head in each other's sharp company. He held his slight figure erect and stepped out along the road with a come-and-go smile on his lips. He was admiring the polish on his boots, and if he had been asked suddenly what song the Syrens sang or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women he would probably have known. At each mess they had, for civility, a drink. The transport produced a bottle of champagne. At this point the Bloody Child, with a sidelong glance at Nat, unostentatiously stopped drinking. Nat did not. He put down a quantity and variety of drinks that had no visible effect, less potent than the excitement that had possession of him. He was demobilised, by Daniel's offices. He was going home the next day. His heart was broken to leave the battalion, with which, except for a brief and ignominious month at divisional headquarters (he was a complete failure), he had gone through the war. He had worked for it, sworn at it, cherished it, given it what of himself he would never have to give to anything in this world again. He felt a naked howling babe when he thought of tomorrow. When he thought of Denny he was lifted clean out of himself for happiness. His laugh begot laughter and profane

affectionate blessings. By the time he reached the concert hall his thoughts had got loose from his head and were swinging in the empyrean; the sky was dark and corrugated and the stars stank of oil and spluttered abominably. Rum punch, of a faith to move mountains, was going the round, and he had some of it, with added brandy.

This was too much. He leaned against the Bloody Child, who whispered in his ear. The Colonel had been undressed and put to bed already, looking in front like an old baby and from behind like a hen. Nat said: "Nonsense," and laughed until he cried. After the concert, supper in the headquarters mess. Here Nat's friend Lewis had the misfortune to offend him. Nat at once put him under arrest for misbehaviour. He heard Sykes say indulgently: "But you can't do that, you know, Nat." Remorse overcame him. He sobbed bitterly on Lewis's shoulder. Still sobbing, he was led away to bed. At the top of the stairs a moment of lucidity visited him. "But you're sober," he told Sykes.

The Bloody Child nodded wisely. "Someone had to look after you," he pointed out. "Now then, ducky, here's your nice Belgian bed. Don't fall under it. You'll suffocate." He left Nat, who lay down on the bed and pulling over himself the horrid zeppelein affair that covered it, slept for two hours, woke stifled, undressed, slept again, and woke in time for breakfast. He felt ashamed of himself and remarkably well. A hazy recollection of Sykes's loving care clouded his eyes. "It's finished," he said aloud. "Oh, damn everything. Why am I alive, and better men dead? God bless young Sykes and make me a better boy."

The heavy feet of two of his men slipped and rang on the icy pavement under his window. They did not happen this year to be trailing pikes but they were full of familiar oaths. "These 'ere Dutchmen—" it began. Nat smiled and caught his breath. Something he valued was finished for him, some spirit gone out of him. . . .

He reached Victoria at six in the morning, twelve hours earlier, by a lucky accident, than he was expected. In the station he had a cup of coffee. The question what he was going to do with himself, shelved until now, kept coming at him. "I'm twenty-three," he thought. "I wonder how old I look." He twisted round to look at himself in the glass on the wall behind him. All he saw was a short slight youngster in stained uniform with leather on the cuffs of the sleeves. He might, but that he was not friendless, have sat for any one of those uncounted, who paused in that room between two worlds and wondered what in hell (they now out of it and hoping for the best) they were going to do. Emily could have told him more about himself than in that frowning glance he saw. She would have noted that every softness had gone from the young angles of his face. Faint lines, of strain and exposure, had drawn themselves under his eyes and dug deep into his forehead. Her boy looked well—he had had five weeks of a life not unlike school camp—but curiously fine-drawn. . . . She might have noted, being his mother, the precise moment when he began to think about Denny, and to draw faces on the table with his spoon. He stood up, and smiled through his lashes at the girl writing out his bill. He left his heavy luggage to be called for, and set off to walk to the flat, a little dizzy between the fatigue of the journey and his thoughts of Denny.

It struck eight as he flew up the stairs. The new housekeeper opened the door. She was one of those large dusty women who appear to sleep under the bed and not on it, but Nat met her smiling like an angel. She was just about to wake Denny with her tea. "Give it to me," Nat said.

He stood beside her with the cup of tea in his hand. He felt near tears because she was so warm and pretty in his bed and because he had loved her and thought only of her since he halted on the stairs at Saints Rew and saw her above him, and

because the battalion was being broken up and he could never tell her about it, being a dumb clumsy fool. He got to his knees beside the bed, setting the cup carefully on the floor. Denny woke, startled, when he put his arm under her. He kept on telling her that he had come home, and caressed her with his hands and his foolish boy's words. He even remembered, to his later undoing, the trick Fanny had taught a little boy, and he leaned over her, his eyes dancing, and brushed their lashes across her warm cheek. "It's been such an age," he said. "I've wanted you so. Oh Denny. *You blessed.* My dear, my darling, I love you."

"You're hurting me," Denny said.

"Forgive me." Giddy, Nat dropped his head on his wife's shoulder, still holding her in one arm. He wished silently that she would touch him with her hands, and laid one of his own, square and curiously childish, on her breast. "Be kind to me," he whispered.

"I am kind," Denny said. "I've been supporting you for ten minutes, and the ring on your little finger is cutting into me."

Nat withdrew his arm hastily, and stared at his ring, George's gift. His foot caught the edge of Denny's cup of tea and upset it over a pair of slippers. He swore sharply.

"There," said Denny, "do go. You've ruined my evening slippers, and your language is worse than ever."

"Darling, I'll buy you another pair. Ten pairs. You forget my gratuity. Kiss me and say it doesn't matter. It doesn't. You know it doesn't." He caught her up and kissed her thoroughly. "Wouldn't you like me to help dress you?"

"No I wouldn't," Denny said flatly. He went at that, and to her annoyance, shut himself in the bathroom for an hour, where he splashed and sang *Am stillen Herd* while she raged up and down outside. He came to breakfast in a blue suit.

"Pretty good," he said complacently. "I can still get into the clothes I wore at Winchester."

"It's very shabby."

"I'll order a new lot to take you out in. I'll go this morning."

When he was going, Denny asked him if he would be home for lunch.

"I thought I'd lunch at the club."

"No. Please lunch here. I want you. . . ."

After lunch he held her firmly in her chair. "You're going to think of something you've always wanted to do, something extravagant. We'll go and do it—to celebrate. You—oh you darling." He forgot what he had been going to say. "Darling, darling. We're going to be happy. You look so sweet. I've remembered you at the queerest times. You don't want to hear about them and I don't want to tell you. I don't want to do anything except live with you and look at you for the rest of my life. Am I being a fool? You don't mind, do you?" He kissed her lightly, his heart a wildness in his side.

Denny sat up. "I want to talk to you," she said. "Please go and sit down, Nat."

"What is it?"

For the first time since he came back, his wife's composure was shaken. She looked at him unhappily, and he came to her side again. "What is it, my heart? Something you don't want to tell me?" The thought struck him that she was going to confess to having spent all the money in their joint account. It had been in that state when he came last on leave and he had been furious and scolded her. "Nothing matters between you and me," he said gently. "I couldn't be angry with you. Tell me."

Denny shook her head. "Please go away, Nat. And sit down."

He went to stand by the window. For some reason he had begun to tremble. "Couldn't you—get on with it, Denny?"

She got on with it as shortly as she could. For one moment, when she was explaining that she had been in love with George

Savill for two years, the room disappeared from Nat completely. He caught in the advancing blackness at the windowsill.

"I'm sorry," he said politely. "I'm afraid I missed that last bit. Do you mind repeating it?"

"I said that we hoped you'd let me—divorce you. I—I'm sorry, Nat."

The boy pushed his hands deep in his pockets. "Never mind, you can't help it," he said. He added stiffly: "I'm frightfully sorry about this morning. It must have been a dreadful bore for you."

Denny cried: "Oh don't," and it broke his nerve. He came staggering across the room and held her tightly. "It isn't true, Denny. You don't mean it. You can't. You can't. Think." He was in agony. His very body was full of pain.

Denny began to cry and he let her go at once. "I beg your pardon," he said. He stood looking at her for a long time without much emotion. "Don't cry," he said. "It always makes your head ache. I think I'll go out. You don't mind, do you?" He hesitated. "I suppose you'll have to tell me something more about it. What you expect me to do, and that sort of thing. . . . Do you know, I've just realised you're taller than I am. I don't believe I'd have married you if I'd noticed it before."

Denny flushed. "You've never thought much about me," she said. "You could have stayed in England——"

"Like George. Very nice. All jolly little *embusqués* together." His voice sounded amused.

"I begged you to stay. And you could have come home in the February of this year. I happen to know that you were told you could apply for a job at home. And you didn't apply."

Nat looked at her with a small unkind smile. "Who told you that?"

"George. Some general or other had it from your colonel.

You'd been out three years. You could have come home. You preferred to stay out there. You didn't even tell me."

Nat turned pale. It was all true, and her bitterness staggered him. He might have said that he stayed out because to stay meant more money. She would appreciate that, and it was half a reason. The other half was untellable, a confusion of the spirit which nothing could have made clear to her. "I hated to leave the battalion," he muttered. "And those damned fools at old Raphael's dinner. They were so *dull*. To leave the battalion for that! I should have been bored to death."

"*Bored*. You and your battalion," Denny said thinly. "You thought more of it than you did of me."

Nat groaned. "Oh my love." He felt exhausted and helpless. "I can't go on repeating things," he said. "I've adored you."

"I loved you. I married you when you had no money."

"I haven't any now, but I was going to work for you. Are you sure it's all over?" Denny said nothing, and he turned away from her to lean on the window again, so that all she saw of his face was a hard young profile. He held up his head in a funny gesture of defiance. Emily Grimshaw had seen him stand so a score of times.

"Well, Denny. What do you want me to do?"

"We thought," said Denny, "that I could go on living here for a time. George is in Paris at the Conference. He's done awfully well at the F.O. But he's the most brilliantly clever man I've ever known. . . . We didn't want to do anything until he comes back. And of course George couldn't have a scandal. They still don't like divorces much at the F.O., and his father would be very angry. His career would suffer."

"What about mine?" Nat looked old.

"You haven't got a career," Denny said simply.

Nat shouted: "Good God, do you seriously propose that I

should go on living with you in this flat until you're ready to divorce me?"

"But you're not going to fail me, Nat? I have loved you, I have been good to you. If you won't help me now, I don't know what I shall do." Denny's voice thickened with tears. The boy watching her was tossed between anger and pity. "I'll help you," he muttered. "D'you mind if I go now?" With his hand on the door he turned: "I suppose it's George who wants this delay. Obviously you wouldn't. Possibly it never occurred to him that it was hard on you as well as hell for me."

"We talked it over."

Nat's eyelashes flickered. He glanced at her through them and read in her face that she was labelling this: Jealousy of better man. It was silly of her. "You don't know George very well," he said slowly. "He's abominably obstinate. It's no use trying to force him in any way. You'll only do yourself in. If you'll forgive my saying so." He opened the door suddenly and went out. His lips were trembling, and he was horribly afraid of breaking down.

He walked about London for a long time, discovering unfamiliar squares. In each of them he met and fled from the same devil. He had been tired and miserable often enough during the past four years, but he had never known weariness or misery like this, and at last he went back to the flat because he could not think of any other place to go. Denny was out and the housekeeper had gone home. She had lumbago and a husband of her own. He waited a while to see whether his wife was coming back to dinner and at last concluded that she was not. In the kitchen his researches uncovered an empty sherry bottle, and nothing else except bread and tea. He made himself a cup of tea and moved his things into the little bedroom that had been Emily's. Very early in the evening he began to feel that if he did not go to bed soon he would die there and then. "I shall

faint or be found howling," he thought. He undressed, staggering about the little room. In a drawer he found an extraordinary collection of things, a laundry book, below the last entry in which his mother had written: "Keep the horrible old sheet, then. You have *stolen* mine," one of his school ties, a bottle of aspirin (the twentieth-century travels light: it used to be cordial waters), a recipe for scones copied out in Emily's distracted handwriting, with the comment: *Very filling and cheap to make*, a knife with a broken blade, two foreign stamps, and half of a disreputable little feather boa. What can she have done with the other half, he wondered. He thought she was probably wearing it, but as he got into bed he thrust his hand under the pillow and there it was, squashed wretchedly flat. "So they never changed the bed," he said drowsily and fell asleep with a head-long plunge into blackness.

Denny woke him. She was standing beside his bed in the dark, talking to him. Nat raised himself on an elbow.

"What is it? What do you want?"

"Take me in beside you," Denny whispered.

He had the curious feeling of an actual blow in the side, followed by a very horrid emptiness. He sat up, shivering.

"But do you want to come in?" he asked stupidly.

"Yes."

She was very cold and the boy tried to warm her against himself. He wondered whether she could help hearing his heart; it was making, he thought, a ridiculous and humiliating exhibition of him. "Are you warmer now?" he muttered. His head reeled. Then she had made a mistake about George and come to tell him so? Thought stopped and he was conscious of nothing more but that she was with him. She would tell him, if he kept quiet.

"Nat."

"Yes?"

"Oh, you know."

He lay quietly for a moment. "I know," he said at last. "All right, Denny."

Afterwards, he felt that nothing he had ever done had hurt him so much.

CHAPTER xi

EARLY in July James read in his newspaper that a barony had been conferred on the Rt. Hon. Daniel Grimshaw, for his services at the Ministry of International Intelligence during the war, and as a fitting mark of the brilliant work he had done at the Paris Conference. It was due largely to him, said James's paper, that the British delegation had been better equipped with maps and information than any other there. Followed a hint that on more than one occasion Daniel Grimshaw's suave bulk behind the Prime Minister had grappled his country to the side of justice when leniency was in the softening air.

There was one letter for James, when the postman sweated up to Saints Rew from the village. It was from Nat, very short, two jeering lines on his uncle's new honour, of which he had heard at his club, and a line about his work. He was going on with his physics at London University. He had rejected with horror the idea of going back to Oxford, but when James offered him three hundred a year he did not ask where the money was to come from. He took it and started work at South Kensington.

In some way the boy's letter hurt James. The bitterness was not explained by his dislike of Daniel. Besides—the boy must not break with Daniel, who could help him enormously in his career. The least worldly of men, James was alarmed at the signs of social recklessness in his son. He packed a bag and went up to London.

He rang up Nat on Sunday morning to say that he would come to tea. When he arrived he was a little surprised not to be

greeted by his daughter-in-law. She was commonly very eager to see him, all over him, Emily said. Nat explained that Denny had gone out for the day. He got tea ready for the two of them very cheerfully, putting a loaf and the butter on the floor.

"I always think cut bread-and-butter is so vulgar, don't you?" he said. "And this way you have what you like and no overs."

He had an exhausted air. There were heavy lines on his face and his eyes were bloodshot and strained. He waited on James with an eager solicitude, sitting on the floor with the loaf, and ate nothing himself.

"You're overworking, Nat."

"What else is there that's worth doing?"

"You'll get stale."

Nat looked uninterested. "There's nothing else I want to do," he explained. "I'm at the laboratory all day until six or seven, I dine at the club, and play bridge or go back to work until two or three. It's the life I've chosen."

"Your wife doesn't see much of you."

Nat jumped up from the hearthrug and sat himself on the end of the couch. He swung his legs and smiled. "I'm glad you came up," he said. "I was coming down to see you and my mother. Denny and I have decided to separate. I shall have to give her a divorce, of course. You must know the best man to go about that. It's sure to be pretty beastly, but dealing with a gentleman might make it easier. I suppose there *are* decent divorce lawyers. Concise Smith is a member of my club, and he's a filthy swine. I couldn't stand having him."

James shrank from trying to play the part of censorious parent. He had never adopted it and it became doubly ridiculous in face of the tight-lipped youngster dangling his legs off the end of the couch. He was shocked and distressed.

"But you're only twenty-three," he murmured.

"Twenty-four. I had a birthday last week, which you failed to remember."

"Oh," said James. "Would a fiver meet the case?"

"Thanks awfully," Nat said, and added thoughtfully: "I don't think I should give me anything in your place. This divorce is going to cost someone money, but unless my wife sues *in forma pauperis* it won't be me." He slid off the couch and stood beside his father, polishing one hand affectionately on James's shoulder-blade. "I'm not a pauper, thanks to you. But I shall have to give my wife at least half my allowance."

James said carefully: "Could you tell me anything about it? You'll have to tell the lawyers, you know." He was wondering painfully whether the boy had been getting into trouble during the war. It could have happened so easily. He glanced at his son, and sighed. "Do you want to marry again?"

Nat laughed violently. "Good God no," he said. "It's nothing of that sort. It's just that—we can't get on. Denny says I've become impossible. My temper's vile and she'd rather do anything than go on living with me." He paused. "She's absolutely right, of course. My temper really has been hellish, these last few months. I don't seem able to do much about it, either."

"It hardly seems reason for divorce," James ventured. He thought bitterly that the boy's wife might have made allowances. Nat's temper had been sweet enough.

Nat's mouth hardened. "There's a good deal in it," he said briefly. "My wife is not to blame in any way, you know. She has simply, and quite rightly—given me to understand that I'm no longer satisfactory. Either intellectually or physically." His face was suddenly distorted. Denny had allowed—no, encouraged him to fulfil the latter of his functions, until the near return of George made it indelicate. Or unnecessary. He turned his back on a searing and intolerable memory.

"She's far cleverer than I am," he said lightly. "I am no

companion for her. I can't even talk to her about the things she's interested in. Old Sadgrove must have given her, one way and another, a pretty good grounding in the politer arts."

His daughter-in-law had seemed to James a singularly limited young woman, but he kept his mouth shut. Nat had persuaded himself that his wife was as intelligent as she was pretty, and James respected illusions in other people. He had so few of his own.

"What are you going to do, my dear?" he asked quietly.

"Denny thinks she could keep on this flat. She has taken rooms for me in South Kensington. I haven't had time to look for any myself."

"Are they pleasant?"

"I don't know. I'm going to see them tomorrow. They'll have to do." Nat sighed. "I do dislike London," he said boyishly. "It stinks."

"You could go back to Oxford."

"Impossible. I'm too old, sir."

James looked at his son thoughtfully. He had seen many types, of many countries, but his son was a new type, baffling a mind skilled in rapid judgments. He was so young, with the dreadful defencelessness of youth, that his father could have wrung his hands in pity, and yet marked and staggering under his burden of experience. He was like a child whom life has set on the defensive. Wary, arms arched in front of him, he stood on guard for the blows he expected to descend on his shrinking young body. Half unconsciously James flung him the disconcerting upward glance that had startled cleverer men. He saw the boy flinch away, still on guard. With an aching heart, he gave up the thought of questioning him closer. He felt younger and less experienced than his son, as if in the past four years Nat had taken a short cut and now stood at his elbow. James thought painfully: He must do the best he can for himself.

"I wanted you to call with me tomorrow on your uncle. You must not cut yourself adrift. Daniel can be of more use to you than I can."

Nat became profane about this, but at eleven o'clock on Monday he followed James into Daniel's room at the Ministry. It was a very large room and looked out across the river. A wide desk stood near the window, and three armchairs for the use of visitors; there was nothing else between the desks and the Adams fireplace except a silk carpet, the most superb thing Nat had ever seen. Nothing in the room recalled James's crowded corner in the War Office. Its magnificent austerity contrasted with that scene of disorder as pre-war Europe, fermenting with ambitions, greeds, hates, and filled with confused noises, showed up against a Europe swept bare by war and garnished by peace. Its emptiness was vast enough to accommodate a Conference. It did in fact accommodate one, since the walls were decorated with sketches, by a famous artist, of all the chief personages at the Peace Conference just finished, including the enemy delegation, so that the room held them all, Germany stunned by defeat, France poisoned by victory, Italy in a fever, England almost as bent under peace as her late enemies under war, the new nations born in the wake of the armies and bursting out of their clothes in all directions, and older nations dazed or watchful or violently irritated, according to their late wounds and present situation as poor relations at the board. The artist had caught the American representative in the act of walking away, thus putting him, poor man, into an accord with his country's desires and intentions which he was far from accepting.

Daniel was in high good humour. He treated Nat with a respectful friendliness which soothed that haughty young man in spite of himself. He deferred to James, asking his advice about an old colleague, and drawing him on to talk about the Balkan

States as if they were tiresome children whom James had brought up.

"Gad, what you know!" he exclaimed. "You ought to have been in Paris."

James twinkled. "I should have been out of place. So far as I can gather, you avoided knowledge like the plague. You made an awful treaty, my dear."

Daniel's eyes clouded. "We had to get something settled and back to peace. It'll work out."

James waved Europe aside. "Nat is studying at South Kensington," he said.

His brother looked interested. "As soon as you're ready you can come into Grimshaw and Grimshaw. Tomorrow if you like. I shan't start you at the bottom; I've no love for that tradition. You'll get a good salary and every lift I can give you. Someone has got to inherit the firm. I don't want to sell it. I've no heir." The ghost of a young and lovely Fanny stepped between him and his nephew.

Nat said gently: "It's very good of you, sir. At present I'm sticking to science."

A door in the wall farthest from the window opened noiselessly. Nat looked up and saw standing there, between Signor Sonnino and the dissenting back of the President of the United States, the young woman with whom Daniel had been talking outside the Ritz. It was a compromising situation and she appeared to know it. She might have passed for a secretary—Daniel's Ministry was full of pretty and efficient young women for whom a distracted Europe was no more than a name that wore out the ribbons of their typewriters, far less real to them than the cinemas to which they resorted after six o'clock in search of excitement to round off a dull day. But she was in outdoor dress, with a small hat pulled over one eye. She had a charming sulky face, which now that he saw it across Daniel's

gorgeous carpet, was familiar. Nat frowned in an effort of memory. Daniel had his back to her. She hung there for a moment, eyeing the young man with a queer defiance, and vanished. The door shut behind her.

"Not much money in pure science," his uncle said genially. "Well, you know where to apply it. But, mind you, boy, Grimshaw's is a business firm. I can buy bushels of chemists and physicists with first-class degrees, more than I can use. I shouldn't want you in that capacity. Do you understand me?"

Nat did. When he and James stood outside, he said roundly that nothing would induce him to take Daniel's offer. James sighed. "You see what happens to experts," he said wistfully. "It's an amateur's show. The war was cleaner and less bloody than Daniel's peace. And if you want to get on, you'll go in with your uncle and leave pure knowledge to the other fellow." He hesitated. "You'll not be able to keep up Saints Rew unless."

Nat said nothing. He might have retorted that James had kept up two passions all his life. But life was narrowing down for the generations that had followed James's. A man now was going to be either very lucky or very brave if he allowed himself an unprofitable passion. The world lacked a faith. In place of the older ones a new religion had crossed from America to Europe. It used the old phrases of service and honour. But when it said Service it meant salesmanship. It meant Getting On, it meant Being a Success. It meant every damned dirty profiteers' trick of buying cheap and selling dear. If a moneyless man had nothing to sell or did not know how to sell it, he was not only a failure, he was dishonoured and a heretic. And this is something new. Business was never a religion before, and a successful Victorian (to go no further back) did not consider that he was performing a divine act in selling people more of something than they wanted. He thought he was merely making money for himself and his heirs. But Daniel Grimshaw's business house was

hung with soul-sickening texts about Service, and his advertising manager had begun to spell it House, as if it were of God.

There were times when Nat could have made his religion out of Saints Rew. Then he was glad that he had gone shabby for its perfection. He thought of it with longing. When he went down for a week-end he wandered about the house, laying his hand lovingly on old panels and tracing the old mouldings with gentle fingers. It was the voice of this English valley. His heart ached over it. When he came home to it in the dusk and saw its windows fronting him with their mysterious intimate glance he felt utterly happy. He had no problems, no griefs but a child's passing sorrows. As he came across the lawn time slid backwards in the silvery track of his feet. He came home like a child to lean on a kind knee; where he had laid so many childish ambitions he now laid the war, his dead friends, Denny, and his sleepless nights.

But for all that, he was not yet willing to go in with Daniel to save Saints Rew. Since he came back to it, his work had acquired a new importance. What before the war he had done more out of a vague inclination, a mere inherited turn for science, he now did passionately, and because he had to have some purpose in his life. Without a purpose his life would be blank, intolerable, a stupid hell. He was not pretending to be absorbed in his work. He was absorbed. If at first it had distracted him from thinking about Denny, now it was Denny, when she thrust herself into his mind, who was the distracting thing. He got rid of her as quickly as possible. He relegated her to his dreadful nights in Emily's bed. It was the most uncomfortable bed in the world. Unless he lay stiffly on the ridge in the middle he rolled down one side or the other, on to the wall or the floor. On this he slept uneasily or lay awake and fought the devil. At times he thought he hated Denny. Oftener he was sorry for her and longed to see her happy. Some nights she

called him or he heard her crying in her room; then he went in and tried to comfort her. He hoped she was comforted. It would be a pity if neither of them got anything out of his crucifixion.

His work at South Kensington had become the thing he had to do to be saved. It was something of his own. By it at first he hoped to make something of himself. It stood for his self-respect. Gradually it became valuable to him for its own sake. He was only at the beginning of the world as physics, but it stood for him as something clean and decent and shining in a disgusting welter of disappointments and mistakes. He did not want to look at what his uncle had done to Europe. When he recalled that he and Perry Smith had once sat in a dugout and talked of the new world after the war he felt revolted and ashamed. He saw photographs of famine children in Austria and Central Europe and they sickened him so that he did his best to forget about them. *They* were not his fault, thank God. He was responsible for no more than the men he had killed and he had never seen one of those, to know him. It was his uncle who, under pretence of cleaning up, had poured acid into the wounds of the war. His uncle had seen to it that Perry Smith died for a conclusion that would have made him vomit. Nat did not want to think about it or look at it. He did not want to think about his dead friends, or the ignominious end of his marriage. He thought of his personal life as finished. Everything in him that was still young and hopeful, the dreams he thought done, his courage, and above all, his pride, now he gave to his work. It had taken the place of his battalion and of Denny. It was the one stable thing in his world.

If he had to give it up, even for Saints Rew, he would be done for. He did not try to imagine what his feelings would be when the care of Saints Rew fell to him. And he never asked himself how his father was finding the money to keep up the house and allow him three hundred a year. If he had thought about it he

would have supposed that James had saved money during the years when he was taking a tenth share of the firm's profits.

As they turned out of Whitehall James said abruptly: "That was Coyle-Read's daughter in Daniel's room."

"Oh. You saw her."

"I don't think your uncle did."

"They've known each other a long time. I saw them together a year ago."

They exchanged these brief sentences standing on an island in the middle of Trafalgar Square. Snatched away, as soon as spoken, by the shattering noise, they left behind them a queer sense of mystery in Nat's mind.

"I thought Coyle-Read and my uncle had quarreled."

"Coyle-Read will never forgive Daniel for attending the Conference in his place."

"I must go," Nat said. "I have a lunch."

"Goodbye. I could let you have a little more money, I think. At least, I'll pay your club subscription."

"Oh bless you."

Nat dodged across the road. He had already forgotten the strange apparition of Miss Coyle-Read in his uncle's room. He was meeting George and Denny at lunch, and when he stood on the edge of the pavement in Pall Mall he saw them on the other side.

This was the first time he had seen them together since he came home, and as he watched them he became certain that Denny had told an unnecessary lie when she assured him, in one of her odious phrases, that George had "respected" her. It had not seemed to Nat of the least importance beside the staggering fact that Denny wanted to leave him. He could have forgiven her a mere physical lapse, so easy, he thought, with a queer unyouthful tolerance, in the circumstances of war-time. But now that in some undefined fashion he knew that his wife had been

lying about it he lost his head. For a moment or two he wanted badly to strangle George, and when he caught up with the pair of them on the stairs of the Carlton grill, his face was haggard and he had lost control of the situation before it began.

He had intended to be offhand and friendly and to hand his wife over affably, with due care for her safe passage. He had forgotten that the Duchess's capacity for being affable far outran his. He was paying for the lunch, but George ordered it. George even chose the wine and chose rather badly, Nat thought. He had never seen about any new clothes, after all, and he realised suddenly that he was disgustingly shabby. His suit had been a good suit in 1913, a vintage year, but it was worn out of all shape and there was a large stain on one cuff. It did not worry him much. In fact it rather amused him. He was not unaware that he had an elegance of his own, not entirely quenched by George. He thought George's shirt overdone. At the same time he was suffering from a tight pain in his chest, which made eating difficult. His hands were cold and he sat on them between courses.

George talked handsomely about Paris. It became clear that he had been a not unvalued member of the secretariat. Daniel had consulted him twice. There were very few moments when the British Premier was out of sight of George's sardonic eye. Even when he slept, George was awake, writing up his diary (the Savill Diaries cover already five reigns). He offered to let Nat read it.

"Thanks so much," Nat said. "I'd like to.... You look tired."

George glanced up with a sudden boyish smile. "We worked damned hard," he said, "and most of it was wasted. The women fair turned me up, they did. I mean the women who gave parties, and the fat old generals still saying among the trumpets Ha, Ha. One felt a hog, stuffing caviare and strawberries, with half Europe tightening its belt."

Nat felt a thrill of the old sympathy. He suppressed, out of consideration for his wife, an impulse to say: "*Hullo, my dear fellow,*" and smiled instead.

"D'you remember old von Binnenhalter?" he asked eagerly.

"Was up at Magdalen? Of course I do," George said.

"Well, we captured him on the retreat! I was dashing down a road, looking for some blighters who had gone and lost themselves, when I caught sight of von Binnenhalter sitting on the edge of the road, smoking. I said: 'Good God, Binnie, what are you doing here?' 'Waiting for a 'bus to Magdalen,' says Binnie, 'I left my fountain pen in the Quad.' "

"He owed me a fiver when we were sent down," George said reminiscently.

"The way the exchange is going, you'll have to take it out in castles. He had ten, you remember." Nat chuckled.

"By George, yes."

"Have some burgundy," Nat said warmly.

"I don't think an awful lot of this burgundy," George confessed. "I might have chosen better."

"D'you remember the bottle Carter stood us the day we left Oxford?"

"Do I not!"

Nat leaned across the table. His eyes were bright, and kind with laughter.

"I like your shirt, Duchess."

"Hall sent me in a bill last week for shirts he said I'd bought in 1914," George said. "I'll swear two of them are yours. What are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing."

"What, nothing!" George said indignantly. "I like that. You've had the shirts—I believe that's one you've got on now—and I have to pay for them."

Nat's laugh must have been heard from end to end of the

room: Denny looked at him in horror, and catching sight of her face, he made an effort to stop.

"Of all the stupid conversations," Denny said stiffly.

Both young men apologised. "I'm sorry, Denny."

"I'm frightfully sorry," Nat said. The pain in his chest was still at him, like a hand dragging the nerves together, but it had grown easier. He was persuaded that he should be sick when he got away, but he no longer felt the least desire to strangle George. He did not want to see him again. He had a vague idea that in some intellectual circles it is considered proper to share your wife with your friend in pure amity. The dustier slopes of Parnassus, he rather thought. He considered that revolting, and had no intention of meeting George in amity after this. But he was sore at losing his friend and this feeling surprised him. He thought he had out-grown the Duchess. He told himself that it was not decent to feel twinges of affection for the man who has seduced your wife. He glanced at Denny unkindly. She was choosing a dessert with some care for detail.

"You have a rare good appetite," he said suddenly. It occurred to him that a good part of his married life—such little of it as he had spent with her—had passed in feeding her. Pagani's served a mess of rice and chickens' livers more filling at the price than anything in London. They had had the greater part of his gratuity.

He thought ridiculously that this was probably the last meal he would stand her. The pain in his chest became acute, and he leaned against the edge of the table with a little gasp. He had only just understood what was happening to him. "I've been a fool," he thought. "I ought to have made her stay." The intolerable contrast between present and past rose up and stabbed him. In a few moments she would be gone. It would be finished. The grotesque absurdity of his feelings struck him at the same moment. By all the rules of romantic love he ought to have been

bowled out by the familiar lovely droop of her head he had caressed or her pouted mouth. And what had actually got him down, and was doing for him, was the knowledge that he would never again sit in a pink glow at Pagani's and watch her make a hearty meal. He was torn by an agony of silent laughter.

"What's the matter, Nat? Are you feeling ill?"

Which of them had said that? "No. Nothing," he muttered. His forehead was wet; he hoped neither of the others observed it.

"I thought," his wife said hesitatingly, "we were going to discuss plans."

"There's nothing to discuss. You do want to go, don't you?"

Denny looked at George. "This is damned unpleasant," George said. "I want to marry Denny."

"So I understood," Nat said grimly. "You want me to divorce myself."

George hesitated. "Not yet," he said briefly.

Nat's eyebrows went up. "If you'd wait a month or two," Denny said eagerly. "It's a question of George's career."

"Quite." Nat looked at her savagely, struggling with an impulse to curse George and his career in language that would shock Denny and probably George to the marrow. For the first time it struck him as remarkable that George was willing to risk trouble. It was unlike him. He looked at Denny's bent head and thought it was not very remarkable after all. He recalled something he had been told about the elder Savill: "A brilliant bounder, like all the men of his family, from the time of George the first down, when a Savill whose father was a slop-seller got himself to court in his wife's petticoats. The blood runs blue and yellow by turns. Every Savill has a hairy heel." No doubt it was true, but George was such a nice fellow. He sat on his hands again.

"Very well. I'm prepared to give Denny cause to get rid of me. So far as the flat goes she's getting rid of me today." He

glanced at Denny. "I've packed my things. My bag is at the club. You don't mind sending my boxes after me, do you?"

"I didn't know you were leaving," George said abruptly.

"Quite what did you expect me to do? Also, my wife finds me impossible to live with. I've developed nerves and a temper." All at once he felt that he could stand no more of this interview. "D'you mind if I leave you?" he said formally. "I have an appointment."

He paid the bill and stood up. "Goodbye, Denny," he said gravely. He nodded at George. "Goodbye. Don't accost me about those shirts, will you? I shall probably cut you in Bond Street one of these days."

He thought there was regret in George's eyes. He marched out of the grill-room with his head well up. In the lobby he ran into an etiolated American, who held out his hand. With an effort Nat recalled the evening of Raphael's dinner. "Of course. You're the behaviour merchant," he said cheerfully. "How's the league? How're the rats?"

"Why, just fine," said the other. "We've gotten some literature ready. You'll need to get it, so I'll just give you a little reminder. I'm staying here. Perhaps you'll call me up and we'll have luncheon together."

The prospect appalled Nat. With gestures expressive of too much honour, he hurried away, thrusting into his pocket the proffered leaflet, and outside the Carlton took a 'bus to see the room Denny had taken for him. It was at the top of a gloomy peeling house in Earl's Court. It was small, dark, and not very clean, like the old woman who panted up the stairs to show it to him. In his first dismay, he almost told her that nothing would induce him to sleep in the place. Then he remembered that he had allowed Denny to pay a month's rent. "She might have taken a little more trouble about it," he thought unhappily. He decided to make the place do, until he could find a

better, and telling the old woman he would bring his bag in that evening, he left, relieved to find himself in the open air again. Now that everything was over, his spirits lightened perceptibly. If he had only been going back to France he would have been happy. Catching sight of himself in the mirror of a shop he decided recklessly to call on his tailor. That undemonstrative gentleman received him with every mark of liking and gratified him enormously by saying: "No such cloth nowadays," with a tweak at the lapel of Nat's shabby coat. He measured Nat again, and added respectfully: "Your shoulders are almost too perfect, sir."

"Bless you, Ford," Nat said. "You're kinder to me than anyone I know."

He came away smiling, and made for his club, where he ordered a glass of the good sherry. As he drank it, he remembered the American's leaflet. He pulled it out and read it with a puzzled eye. It was headed: *An Absorbing Volume*, and following that: "Here is a cleaner, braver, more daring view of life's greatest adventure. Physical love is traced through all its kaleidoscopic phases from the bacillus to man. The love-life of the cave-man and the blind-worm; the spider, the jellyfish, the bee; of fish, flesh and fowl; of plants and the whole love-complex of savage and civilised men and women—all these are presented in genuine idiomatic English. Send one dollar deposit for a week's approval. *This book will change your love-life.*"

"He's given me the wrong one," Nat said, stupefied. He dropped it thoughtfully in the waste-paper basket, his lips twitching with laughter, which he kept back for the sake of the nice old gentleman dozing in the window. He was deeply attached to old Foulkes, who belonged to an age when good manners, sound instincts, and a tempered knowledge of the world, were valued above more obvious attainments. He wondered

dreamily whether Foulkes would cut him when the divorce came on. He hoped not.

The room was warm and he felt sleepy. Gradually, as he slipped lower in his chair, the lines on his face smoothed out. He became a boy again, as young as the boy who had married Denny Sadgrove, and men who were dead came alive, and put off their tryst with death to talk to him, before turning their backs again on a world of which they had enjoyed only the long days of youth and the eternity of childhood.

Old Foulkes, crossing the room quietly, stopped to glance down at Nat asleep. His eyes caught the edge of a folded blue paper in the boy's breast pocket. "Ah, in those days *I* had debts," he murmured. "Fortunate young man."

CHAPTER XII

IN November Emily had a letter from Nat's landlady. It ran: "Dear Madam, your son in addition to which he screams at night has had influenza with no assistance from me. I am past all that now. He should have been seen to. Yours respectfully, K. Baronet."

She went at once to town, and after no more than the time taken to leave her bag in St. James's Place, Fanny's laments cut short, she hurried to Nat's rooms. His landlady creaked up the stairs in front of her, only her stays keeping her off the horrors of both walls as she went. Emily crept up behind, treading carefully in the middle. "Did you write this letter?" she asked.

"Not to say write it," retorted K. Baronet. "But responsible for same. Not for valuables left in lodgers' rooms." Very strange, thought poor Emily, wondering how so elliptical a mind contrived to exist in the globular body in front of her. She was still puzzling over it when the top of the house came unexpectedly with an air of having been broken off short in a fit of repentance on the part of the builder.

She found Nat sitting half-dressed on the edge of his bed. "I couldn't stand it any longer," he said angrily. "I was just going to the club." He was shivering with fever.

"Get back into bed," Emily ordered.

"I can't. I must get away. I can't bear this."

She knew too well that look of fretful obstinacy on Nat's face. Turning her back on him, she stared forlornly out of the little window. The prospect was as melancholy as the room, with a

shabby dusk following a penurious day. She heard Nat say: "All right," in a defeated voice, and whirling round, saw him getting back into bed. He could not find the top button of his pyjama jacket. "Oh, damn and blast the thing," he shouted, tears of rage and misery running down his face.

Emily flew to him. "You silly child," she repeated. "Oh, silly, silly." Her arms ached with the weight of his slight body. She let him slip down in the bed, and began to straighten it out. There was nothing to be done to the room. Its bleak discomfort baffled her; it was pathetically neat, with all Nat's clothes hung behind a curtain and a few things, two hair-brushes, a bottle of hair lotion and an orange stick, laid out on a little shelf under the window. He had added nothing to them since he went to school.

"Darling," Nat said. "You ought to have come before. You always pretend you love me when I'm at home, and as soon as I come away you forget all about me."

"Nat!" his mother cried, fluttering, as she always did, into every trap he laid for her. When he gave a hoarse crow of mirth she said angrily: "Don't laugh. You'll hurt your throat. I'm ashamed of you."

"I knew it."

"Oh, darling. Oh my little dear. Why are you living in this dreadful place? And that old woman, with her stays and her groans. She's not responsible for anything, she says, and what does she mean about your screaming at night?"

Nat looked amused. "I'm sure I don't scream," he said. "I was much too well brought up. And as for not being responsible, she's dragged up here a dozen times a day with the foulest messes in the world, all guaranteed to cure me if I'd only try them. She's a kind old hag. That's why I stayed on."

"Who wouldn't be kind to you? Except that girl. I suppose

she got you this room. And living on the fat of the land herself. She's a wicked woman, I knew it when she was living with me."

Nat pressed his lips together and looked at her unkindly. "You mustn't talk like that about Denny," he said briefly.

Emily said humbly: "Very well. But I hate her." She looked down at him sorrowfully. "Are you warm enough, my darling?"

"Too warm."

"But this room's cold. I'm going out to buy things. How thin you are, my baby."

"I don't need anything, and you've no money. That isn't my ribs you can see, it's the quilt."

"I have ten pounds," Emily said mysteriously. "Your uncle gave it to Fanny for her Poor Clergy. She says her own nephew comes before any stranger, however holy, and no clergyman worthy of the name would rob you."

Nat's smile ravished her. "You are an unscrupulous pair," he said softly. When she had gone, he turned over and went to sleep. A pleasant weariness, quite different from the anguished exhaustion of the past days, took possession of his limbs, flowing gently through them. He felt that the worst of his illness was over; and in some miraculous way, Emily had managed to smooth out a ridge in the mattress that for days had tormented him.

She came back with a pile of large oranges, a dozen oysters and a bottle of port. It was Daniel's port, and she made Nat laugh weakly by a recital of Fanny's audacity. "First she sent for cook and ordered her to bring up a bottle of the best port. Then just as the woman was going she said: 'On no account let your master see it.' Back came cook with the bottle and two glasses. 'Take the glasses away,' screamed Fanny. 'Do you want to ruin me?' Cook was overcome by the vulgarity of our tippling out of the bottle, and you know you *can't* drink comfortably out of a heavy bottle, Nat, and shocked by Fanny's secret drinking.

Then Daniel came in and Fanny pushed it under the bedclothes. She was terribly afraid he would sit on it and kept making faces at me to get him out. He won't give anyone a bottle of his good port. He keeps it for his noblest friends, and when Lloyd George came to dinner and Briggs put it out by mistake Daniel was in a rage. He said Lloyd George wouldn't know the difference between Dow's '04 (all nonsense—he'll buy himself the best of everything, you may be sure) and grocer's sherry. So that what he would have said to Fanny's giving you a bottle, I can't imagine. At last he went and here it is, and Fanny's reputation in the house gone for ever. All for you. We'd better borrow things from that mountainous woman and decant it. And your aunt says you needn't live in this way. You could go into the firm and make piles of money. Didn't Daniel tell you?"

"He did," Nat said shortly. "Things have got to be worse than they are before I start working for that—the only word for him is an army word you haven't heard and wouldn't like the sound of. I'm sorry."

"Oh Nat," his mother lamented. "I thought it would solve everything."

Nat laid his cheek on her hand. "Did you, darling?" he said dreamily. "I couldn't do it. Don't ask me to give up the only thing I've got left."

He had the oysters, with a lemon and pepper supplied by K. Baronet, and a large glass of the port. Emily sat beside him making pleased sounds. Her last meal had been breakfast at Saints Rew, but she would have lied her soul away rather than tell him. He never asked her. As he swallowed the last oyster he said: "I could live on oysters."

"I don't see why you shouldn't, until you're better," Emily said reflectively. "I could buy some, and Fanny could say she'd been ordered them by her doctor and get a dozen up to her room every morning."

"She'd have to explain away the missing shells," Nat said gravely.

"She could say I'd thrown them out of the window, or I was collecting them, or she'd lost them." Emily's eyes were very bright.

"You're a shocking old lady," Nat murmured. "How do you expect to be forgiven for all these lies?"

"They've got something better to do up there than worry about a few oysters," his mother said serenely. She had forgotten the severe disappointment of Nat's refusal to make money. The boy was so happy now. His face had lost its look of strain. He looked warm and contented. She held his hand under the quilt, while the conflicting emotions of triumph and love fought it out in her thin body, erect under the fatigues of the day. Nat moved his head so that it pressed against her arm, and closed his eyes. She looked down at the lashes resting on his cheeks, and at the ineradicable lines on the young face. The room was cold but she felt warmed. Her heart swelled with happiness.

Nat opened his eyes suddenly. "Mother. What did Daniel mean by saying that Saints Rew has been turned into a refuge for German spies? He's a fool, I know, but he had something in his mind. I believe he hates my father because he doesn't read the same newspapers and had a pipe given him by Bismarck and another by Pasteur."

Emily frowned. "He means our two old men," she said. "They were interned. They used to be watchmakers and they can't get work now, in addition to being very queer about time. So your father keeps them. The eldest one goes about the grounds ticking, and striking the hours. The other, poor wretch, says time has been abolished and won't wind up any of the clocks, so trying when you have got a watchmaker in the house. Isn't it all dreadful, darling Nat?"

Nat chuckled. "So much for my uncle," he said. He saw that

his mother was looking at him in a troubled way. "What is it, my dear?"

Emily hesitated. "Your father is selling things out of the house," she said at last. "You know it costs a terrifying amount of money to keep the place in order. And he will have it perfect. I don't mind—now."

"What is he selling?" Nat asked sharply.

"Different things. Pictures chiefly. And some of the china. You know, we have only his pension now, and he is giving that up. Your uncle said something very unpleasant to him about it."

Nat made a violent observation. "I wish you wouldn't use such language," his mother said mildly. "It gets me into bad habits and I have to confess to my darling old Father Louis. It upsets him and he gives me penances, not serious ones, but it all takes time."

"My father can't go on selling."

"Some of the things are worth thousands. He'll sell until there's nothing left, but that's a long way off. I used to think that it was those things he loved, but it is the house," Emily said simply. She thought without bitterness of her rival. If she had felt bitter, it would have been because Nat had never had the bicycle he wanted or the frilled petticoats with which her sisters' babies were adorned. She bore Saints Rew no grudge because her James had given it all but the most absent-minded of his caresses. If the house had ever left anything for her, in the way of jewels or money, she would have handed it over now. "Don't think about your allowance," she said. "It's nothing compared with the other expenses."

"I couldn't do with much less," Nat said slowly.

"You mean your wife couldn't," his mother retorted.

Nat looked up with a mischievous smile. "Well, she isn't getting very much, you know, darling."

"Why should she have anything? Let her live with her sister

and the bishop—if there *is* a bishop—and if she won't live with you. . . . Nat, I haven't told Fanny anything about the divorce yet. She doesn't even know that Denny's left you. She called there the other day and Fanny gave her a pot of jam. I can't think why, unless she thought she was saving you money. And how on earth I'm to explain things to her when she has to be told, I don't know."

"Tell her the truth," Nat said hardly. "Tell her that my nerves and my temper have both got so damnable that I'm not fit for anyone to live with."

"Oh darling," his mother said. "It can't be true. Women don't leave their husbands for such things."

"Oh, don't they! Well, Denny did, and I know she was justified." He would not trust his mother with the truth. There was no knowing to what lengths her dislike of his wife might push her. She might even, without wanting to, upset Denny's plans. And he shrank from the bitterness that, springing in her passionate loyalty, would pour over him if she knew that Denny had been misbehaving herself. The mere thought of what she would say about his wife made him wince. Poor darling, she's too old to understand, he thought. He had to protect his wife—so long as she remained his wife. He had to protect himself, from questions he could not answer. How explain, to his mother or to anyone else, why he had not left Denny when he knew what she was about? He shut his eyes. . . . Impossible to tell her. At first he had persuaded himself that the nights when Denny called him to come to her were the real thing and her affair with George a war-time passage. And afterwards, when he could no longer believe that, he was sorry for her, and still wanted to comfort her. But he had been badly humiliated. Thoughts of the way Denny had made use of him worked in him secretly.

It was fast making the boy bitter-tongued and insensitive. As well for Emily that she could neither see his mind nor the way

he spent his time. He could not sit in his comfortless room, and he left off work to go to the club, where he drank rather more than was good for him—because he liked it and because there was nothing else to do until he could get back to work again. He needed to drink to become fully himself. His mind had contrived to drop below the normal level where intercourse with other minds becomes possible. Wine or excitement set it free, and he could talk. It was a release too easy and wasteful, of course, but he did not trouble himself about that.

"Don't imagine I'm still thinking of Denny," he said suddenly. "I haven't forgotten her, and I'd do anything I could, to help her. But I'm not in love with her any more. That's finished." His mother looked at him in doubt, and he smiled lovingly. "You're a silly old lady; hopeless passions are not in my line. I don't believe any man, unless he's a monomaniac, goes on loving a woman who has cut him off. I was wretched at the time, but it's all over now."

"She's a very stupid girl," Emily said fiercely. "She doesn't know what she's lost."

Nat twinkled at her. "She said it was a pity I had been so badly educated, darling, because I was really quite clever."

Emily was speechless with indignation, and he laughed delightedly. "You're such a dear," he said. "I do like you."

"Will you have an orange now?"

"No. I won't. But I'll have another glass of port if you think it would be good for me."

"I don't know whether it would. I shall ring up your father's doctor and ask him." She slipped out of the room before Nat could remonstrate with her and came back flushed and mirthful. "He said what was it, and I told him, and he said: 'Good heavens, it's far too good for the boy. Give him another tablespoonful and I'll come round and see him in the morning.' He was having a dinner-party or he would have come now."

"He's mistaken if he thinks he can come here and flirt with my mother and drink my wine," Nat said indignantly. "The old scoundrel." His mother was measuring out a tablespoonful of the port; she gave it to him like medicine while he held her wrist, and afterwards kissed him thoughtfully.

"Nat, do you remember when I promised you sixpence to take your castor oil, and you said it was delicious and offered me the sixpence back?"

"I don't believe a word of it," Nat said drowsily. "I never refused money in my life."

"You ought to go to sleep now, Nat darling." She tucked him up and stood looking at him as he burrowed his face into the pillow. Nothing was more dreadful than the way children grew up and their gestures did not. It was almost unbearable. To see Nat falling asleep in the attitude he had adopted as a very little boy made her dizzy. With every moment he became more the child he had been and less the rejected husband of Denny Sadgrove. The fingers of his hand, flung out on the quilt, uncurled. His features changed and took on the pathos of extreme youth.

. . . For the first time Emily noticed, on the top of the chest of drawers to which she had been turning her back, a framed photograph of his wife. The girl was always having herself photographed in careful poses. She gave them to Nat as birthday presents, for which he paid the bills. Emily scrutinised the charming affected face almost calmly. She read in it the stupidity and hard root of greed on which Nat had been hurt. For once, it did not make her angry. She even began to be a little sorry for the girl, since anyone so stupid was sure to be defeated, sooner or later. And she had lost the boy.

Afraid to disturb Nat by touching him, she crept quietly away. In the evil-smelling little hall, she came on K. Baronet, gasping over a box of matches. "The shells are on the windowsill," Emily said mysteriously and left the house. She was very

tired and sat bolt upright in a corner of the 'bus, but when she got into Fanny's house and was creeping past her sister-in-law's door Fanny heard her and called peremptorily: "Come in here, Emily Grimshaw. I must know all about it."

Sighing, Emily pushed open the door. Fanny was still propped up in bed. On the eiderdown lay a tract against the evils of alcohol which an unknown hand had slipped between the sheets of the evening paper. "Look at that," Fanny said, struggling with insane laughter. "What on earth are we going to do about it? It's all your fault. If you hadn't led me to think that Nat was dying in his bed. . . . What's to be done?"

Emily only looked at her in dismay.

CHAPTER XIII

IN June of the next year Nat was lodging with Mrs. Clemens in Queen Street. This happy change came about casually. He had been told that George no longer lived there, and walking through Curzon Street, he turned impulsively aside to ask whether Mrs. Clemens wanted to let her son's little room at the top of the house. Mrs. Clemens invited him into the passage. She seemed now incredibly old, a brown slip of an old woman, indifferent and wrinkled. She asked him to look at the room again. He did, and thought it very pleasant. It smelled clean, and the street outside was quiet.

"I should like this room if you could let it to me for a long time."

"He won't want this room any more," said Mrs. Clemens. "Missing, believed dead. He won't come back any more."

She turned and led the way downstairs. On the ground floor she opened the door of a room at the back. It was the smallest of small rooms, with a tiny window, a table, two chairs, and some shelves on the wall. It looked as though it might have been meant for a butler's pantry.

"You could have this too," she said. "You can't sit up there."

Nat hesitated. He asked how much it would be.

Mrs. Clemens studied him. She was wondering, not very clearly, what had happened to him in the six years since he stayed in her house. That was in her sixty-second year, but it seemed to her that she had been a young woman then. The war, in four years, had whirled her to the end of her life. . . . "Good-

bye, old lady, I'll bring you a cuckoo-clock from Berlin." . . . Missing, believed dead. . . . Time doubled up on itself, and squeezed her spirit out of her. She stood in the doorway of the little room with folded hands. Nothing in her mind assured her either that the Dark Ages were not still going on outside or that the world had not reached its apotheosis and was about to be swallowed up by the sun. She was outside time.

What could he pay? "I never counted on getting anything from these two rooms," she said. "And the rest of the house pays better than it did." She felt when she said it as if the boy had died in order to put up her rents. . . . "I could let you the two for thirty shillings. Breakfasts will be one-and-six. Dinners, when you take them, three-and-six. Guests—you can't get but one at that table—a shilling extra."

The rooms were unexpectedly cheap, and though the whole thing would cost more than he ought to pay, Nat took them gladly. He had managed to get some coaching to do, and that meant a little more money. He gave K. Baronet notice, which the old woman received in silence; she had known he would go—they all did—but he had put it off so long that she had allowed herself to think of him as safer than the rest. It made four rooms empty in a week. Going downstairs she clutched at a gas bracket on the wall. They came into her house and left again, doors opened and shut, bells rang, and no one ever said: "What's going to happen to you, old lady?" What, indeed? . . .

For the first week or two in Queen Street Nat could hardly believe in the change in his life. His two rooms were so clean that he found himself looking round them in conscious bliss, his breakfasts well cooked, and his shoes polished as in the good days of the battalion. Horribly afraid of being thrown out of this paradise he took enormous pains to deserve well of Mrs. Clemens. She soon became aware of it, and chuckled rather grimly; the sound startled her, coming out of a past as dim and

long gone by as the sound of the mill-stream below her first home. When he had been there a fortnight he invited Ann to dinner and consulted Mrs. Clemens anxiously on the question of a suitable meal.

“What will the young lady be like, sir?”

“She’ll be twenty-one, or nearly. She looks younger. I don’t think I ever heard her speak of anything she cared to eat, except strawberries.” He smiled suddenly, recalling a distant afternoon at Saints Rew when he and Ann had picked and eaten strawberries until neither of them was able to move farther than the nearest tree, under which they lay with hands clasped lovingly over their small stomachs, silent, until the evening.

“Strawberries,” repeated Mrs. Clemens. “You’d better leave it to me. . . .”

Ann came in shyly. “Why, Ann, this room just fits you,” Nat cried.

“Do you think so?” Ann said doubtfully. “I hoped I’d grown.”

“Don’t grow. I like you best as you are. How’s Oxford?”

“I’m not liking it very much,” Ann said placidly. “I try to keep out of things. I’m supposed to be sweet but reserved.” She made an astonishing grimace. “Sweet. I think the most awful things, Nat, usually in German. Luckily they don’t bother me to do things much. They think, because Oxford doesn’t agree with me and I have to take iron, that I’m delicate.”

“Ann, you can tell me something I’ve always wanted to know. What is the female equivalent of taking the trousers off an objectionable undergraduate?”

“I’m not sure. I believe they don’t ask you to cocoa or something.”

“Darling Ann. . . . I don’t remember, when I was up, ever seeing anyone from the women’s colleges.”

“You’d see them now,” Ann said darkly. “Sometimes they’re quite reckless. One drove up to town last term and came back

the following day in broad daylight, with her car laden with young men. She was sent down."

"I should hope so," Nat said fervently. He enjoyed having Ann opposite him at his little table. The flowers in the centre got in the way, and he had only glimpses of her round head. When the strawberries came in, he carried the bowl round to her and ladled them on to her plate.

"Enough, Nat."

He went on pouring cream. "You need nourishing," he said. "You miserable little thing."

Ann looked up at him with a warm loving smile, and he went back to his place, feeling happy and rather pleased with himself. By the time the table had been cleared and the flowers pushed out of the way he was trying to startle her into smiling again. It was a long time since anything so pleasant as Ann had happened to him. He told her so.

"What are you doing then, Nat?"

"Working."

"Do you sit here every evening?"

Nat shook his head. "I usually play bridge at my club."

"Would you rather be doing that now?"

"Good God no," Nat said. He hesitated. He began to tell Ann about his work. Frowning slightly, she tried to follow him, but she understood nothing except that he was engrossed. He talked and she listened. Once he paused and said ruefully: "I'm boring you to death, Ann."

"No. I like you to talk."

Nat leaned forward. "You'll think I'm a fool. I've never said this to anyone, but—I must do something worth doing. I want people to remember my name when I'm finished. Not me, only my name attached to something decent. I want some part of people's lives to be better because of me. It's not conceit, Ann." Diffidently, with an eagerness that grew when he saw that she

was actually listening, he went on talking. "Physics is, in a way, the purest of sciences . . . I wish I could make you see what I mean. You'd like it . . . You've read all about electrons and release of energy and so on, but the fascinating thing is that all those—images—are false, off the straight. The thing is mathematical really, an affair of pure conceptions. I can't find words to make it clear to you . . . But the world is queer, Ann, queerer than you think—queerer, someone said, than you *can* think." He stared at her with bright absent eyes.

"I've done nothing yet," he repeated. "I'm just where I was at eighteen, and I've lost what I had. Life's so short, Ann . . . The strange thing is that when I had the battalion I didn't want anything else. I was perfectly happy."

Ann thought: "If I could only help you, my little sweet." She had begun to feel wiser than Nat from the moment when she fell in love with him. Now she pitied him too, which made her love irrevocable. She would never be able to take it back. She did not believe he would do the things he wanted to do. With all he wants, she said to herself, he'll never be satisfied. Her heart ached over him; he was so uncompromising and certain to be disappointed. She shrugged her thin shoulders and thought cheerfully that she was as unlucky; had as small a chance of getting what she wanted.

Nat had fallen silent and was staring out of the window with a meditative young smile. He held himself, as he always did, with an unconscious tenseness.

"What will become of us, Ann?"

"I don't know," Ann said. "I expect you'll be all right. I daresay I shall be something myself one of these days. We'd better both grow old quickly and then I can come and keep house for you in a garibaldi jacket and elastic-sided boots."

Nat turned his head and caught her looking at him. He smiled through his lashes.

"Dear Ann," he said warmly. "It is nice of you to come to dinner."

"I'd rather be with you than with anyone in the world."

"Is that true?"

"Yes. You must never think anything else. Promise, Nat."

"I promise."

Ann sighed. "I'm not much good at talking. I'm not much good at anything, to tell the truth. Oxford was a mistake. I don't suppose I'm getting that educated outlook you talked about. It's all education and no outlook where I am. And they don't know very much after all. Not one of them can order a meal in five languages," she finished triumphantly.

"What do you want to be, my child?"

"I don't know. I haven't any ambitions. I'm learning shorthand, and I thought perhaps Daniel would take me on. I shall ask him."

When she said she must go, Nat brought her hat and coat and his own. He walked back with her to his uncle's house, taking her a long way round, through side streets and across a corner of the Green Park. The air was deliciously warm; the ground under their feet gave off a faint fresh smell of crushed grass and earth, and at the far side of the Park scattered lights were sunk in the soft night. In the sinister little passage that runs from the Park to St. James's Place Nat took her arm. They lingered outside Daniel's door, standing close together.

"Is it true you're going to divorce Denny?" Ann said abruptly.

"She's divorcing me. Who told you?"

"Your mother. Fanny doesn't know yet. But Nat—" Ann hesitated and said softly: "Have you told your mother the whole story? It doesn't sound very reasonable to me."

"No. It's . . . not a story one tells."

"Will you ever tell me?"

"No. Never. Good-night, Ann."

"And oh good-night, my dear, my dear," Ann cried in a sudden rush of words, like a child.

Nat walked off. His eyes were very bright and he looked about him with an amused air. He thought it was extraordinarily nice of Ann to be so fond of him. It made a perceptible difference to the world. Just now he felt very much as if he were returning from a House dance where all his partners had been charming and one more charming than the rest; and he would sleep, not long but well, and wake to see the grass lying heavy in the House meadows and an intenser sun slanting above the trees.

Mrs. Clemens heard him go up to bed about midnight. Soon after he had gone she followed quietly upstairs, her arms full of cleaned shoes. She got rid of two pairs outside the first floor bedroom and straightened herself contemptuously. Three mornings this week the gentleman behind that door had complained of his breakfast. If he did it once more, he went. She knew that the breakfasts she provided were good, and her rents, though as high with one exception as the neighbourhood warranted, were not unfair. She would allow no one to abuse her sense of justice. She went on up the stairs, her body bent a little forward, in the attitude it assumed when she was lifting a heavy tray. This was her whole life. Her life had been fetching and carrying, for strangers, for James Clemens during the years he lay paralysed and helpless—the mere shell of a gentleman's man—in their dark basement room, and for her son when he was a little boy before he became a young man running up and down for himself. She used to think that what she did was for him, for his future, but now that that was all over she went on with it just the same, as if it had some importance of its own.

When she reached the top floor, she saw that the light was already out in Mr. Grimshaw's bedroom. She went into her own room, the little room at the back, behind his, and left the door

ajar. She moved slowly about, taking off her clothes, and stopping every now and then, to listen. The whole of her house was quiet. When she was getting into bed she heard the sound she had half expected, and huddling on her flannel dressing-gown went noiselessly to Nat's door. There she stood a second, shading her candle with one withered hand. The boy screamed again, a queer hoarse muffled sound. She turned the handle softly and went in. Nat was fast asleep. His face was contorted, and covered with drops of sweat. When the next scream came, she stooped and spoke to him. Her voice came out blurred and kind, like the voice of a girl. The girl whose voice it was had been dead so many years that Mrs. Clemens herself did not remember her. Nothing remained of her but her voice, of which some note reached the sweating terrified spirit of young Nat Grimshaw. His face changed and became peaceful again. With a sigh, he turned over on his side, away from the thin rays of the candle. Mrs. Clemens straightened the bedclothes and gently wiped his forehead. Then she went away, and shut herself in her room, trembling; she was too old for such things. This happened two or three times every week. The first time she had wondered whether her son was not better off dead than living so hurt and maimed in mind. Lately she had begun, in a confused fashion, to think of Nat as having a claim on her because of what her son had escaped. . . .

Nat did not see Ann for a week. Then she turned up at the laboratory, where he was working alone. He greeted her impatiently and she had to wait two hours for him. After that she helped him to clear up. He apologised for his bad temper.

“Do you always work until eight o'clock, my dear?”

“No. But I shan't be able to work here in August. I'm glad you came.”

They ate a cheap supper in a café suggested by Ann. She had nothing to say, and easily seduced him into talking about him-

self until the look of nervous strain had left his face. Afterwards they walked slowly westwards, along Piccadilly and through St. James's. Ann pressed her nose to windows filled with exquisite shirts and suits of silk pyjamas. "I'd like to buy you a lot of things," she observed. "It's a pleasure to dress nice-looking people."

"I feel extraordinarily gay," Nat said. "It's you, Ann. When will you come again?"

"I shan't come to your workshop. It takes too much courage. But when you leave, walk just inside the Gardens and look for me. I'll be there before six, if I'm coming."

Three times in that week he found her waiting for him, a small figure in the corner of a seat. She met him with a radiant face, and said several things in a great hurry, as though she had been rehearsing them beforehand. After that he got little out of her, but he ate cheap and revolting meals without complaint, and let her go reluctantly. She soothed him, and made him laugh at stories of Fanny and Oxford. Every smile she flung him across café tables, almost every word she said (she said so 'few), gave her away. And she was so honest and transparent and without subtle allurements, so gay and loving, that every cheap and ill-served meal they shared was like a kindness between them; and Nat came very quickly to loving her a little, and needing her a great deal. He did not think of it like that. He did not think about it at all. She was his dear Ann, his charming friendly little cousin. Life would be very flat when she went back to Oxford in October.

Long before then, in July, Denny sent him a brief note asking him to find her cause for her divorce. The interview with his father's lawyers, though they were very kind to the harassed young man, left him sore and angry. He made the necessary arrangements with raw distaste.

Someone had to tell Fanny, and his mother came up from

Saints Rew to do it. Fanny took the news badly. Ann had to bathe her forehead with eau-de-cologne and pull down both blinds as if Nat had died and not merely disgraced himself.

"D'you mean to tell me," she demanded, "that your son and my nephew is an adulterer?"

"Not at all," Emily said patiently. "His wife wants to get rid of him and this is the only way. You know perfectly well I don't believe in divorce, but they do, and I daresay I'm an old fool."

Fanny flung herself back in bed. "I don't believe a word of it," she cried. "It's all lies. That girl has behaved badly and Nat is covering it up. How dare you sit there, Emily Grimshaw, and tell me that your own son is going to be divorced by his wife on a false disgraceful charge, while the rest of us sit grinning by."

"I'm not grinning," said poor Emily. "But what can I do? Nat says his nerves have gone and he must live by himself. You don't imagine I want my son to go through all these horrors." Her eyes clouded. She thought of Nat as a child, of the minute record of days and nights kept in her mind and vanishing with her, so that when she died Nat's childhood and his youth would both be finished, and of his marriage and the long agony of the war. No, she could bear no more. Her life had been too much for her. She let her hands fall on her lap, open, empty.

"Mark what I say, Emily, that girl is at the bottom of everything. I told you she was a wretch but no one ever listens to me. She's got hold of another man and now they're getting rid of Nat. The poor boy hasn't enough money for her, never had. Oh darling, how I hate her . . . Daniel will be furious."

You can't hate her as much as I do, thought Emily, and she said slowly: "Nat swears the whole thing is his fault. I daresay he is shielding her. She was always out with men when he was at the front. But he would never give her away."

"Of course it's a man," Fanny retorted. "And Nat has to let

himself be clawed about by some horrible woman in order to set her free. I don't know how you can bear it."

Emily turned pale. "If I were sure—" she murmured.

Ann kept her back to the room, lifting a corner of the blind to look out. She could have told them who the man was. Nat had not told her but she had taken pains to find out. It was no liking for Nat's wife, and not even love of Nat that kept her silent. She was very fond of the two poor old dears behind her, but she felt an obscure obligation to defend Denny from them. They were old and Nat's wife was young, almost her own generation. She shut her mouth hard over a distasteful job.

"What will Denny live on?" she asked over her shoulder.

"Nat," Emily said grimly.

Fanny said: "She came here last week and told me she was starving on the allowance Nat made her."

"It's not true," Emily said incoherently. "I wish she would starve."

Ann turned and smiled at her. "You don't really, my lamb. But these are no days for a delicate female. She ought to work . . . I saw Nat crossing the Park just now. I suppose he's coming here."

She opened the door when she heard his light step on the landing. He came in looking both apprehensive and mischievous. He kissed his aunt and said: "Well, darling, have you cast me off?"

"Oh Nat," Fanny wailed. "I don't know what you have been doing. Now you'll have to spend a ghastly night clutched to the bosom of a dreadful creature in a railway hotel. You can't do it, Nat. They're too uncomfortable and *full* of draughts."

"Of course I can't. It wouldn't be allowed. Far from clutching her bosom I shall play cards and win the whole of her fee from her. In the morning I shall return it with a flourish and say: 'Friend, the price of my shame.' Then I shall ring the bell

and share a good noisy breakfast with her before vanishing into the greenwood, a banished man." He sat on the edge of her bed and smiled teasingly. "Dear Fanny, you and my mother are the only friends I have left." He flung a quick look at Ann, to include her in this. She came and stood at his side.

"Nat," his mother said, "does your wife know what you have to do?"

"Yes."

"She's both wicked and selfish to ask it of you."

The boy's face changed unpleasantly. "Let's leave my wife out of it. May I pull up a blind or has anyone died?" He stood looking at Fanny's lined handsome face. Anger and distress had drawn all the blood from that face in which her eyes stood perpetually on guard over the memory of its beauty. "You mustn't mind about me so much," he said pitifully. "You make me feel younger and sillier and even more selfish than I am . . . Will you come for a walk with me, Ann? It's sweltering hot outside. I love hot weather."

Heat made Ann tired and listless, but she got her hat and walked with him across the Green Park. They sat on two chairs, in the full blaze of the sun. "I feel like a saint on his gridiron," Ann said delicately. "Do you think I shall be striped when I stand up?"

"I hope not indeed," Nat said politely. "You do look rather green. I'm sorry I dragged you out. . . . My mother is the most marvellous woman in the world, but she loathes my wife, and I can't stand it. I have to come away."

"I suppose you love your wife very much?"

Nat looked surprised. "I did. I don't now."

"Nat. If it had been another man, as the aunts think, would you have divorced Denny?"

"Not if she didn't want me to. It is another man, but don't tell them. I think it'd be indecent to divorce your wife against

her will, whatever she'd done. Don't look so upset, my dear. I don't mind about it. I did, but that's over. I mind horribly about the method."

Ann had turned pale. "Will it be 'an unknown woman'?"

"Of course."

"Then let it be me, Nat."

"Don't be silly, child."

Ann crossed her arms over her chest. "Please listen. It's not your fault that the law makes things difficult and—indecent. Why not try to make them as decent as possible? Nat, think. You're so tired. We could go away to some place in the country and you could rest. No one would know. When it's all over we'll tell your mother. She'll be shocked but pleased. Let me do it for you. Fanny won't bother. If I tell her I'm going to stay with friends she won't even ask who are they."

"I can't," Nat groaned. "Have sense, Ann."

"I *am* sensible." She looked at him and said quickly: "If you won't let me, I'll tell everyone I'm your mistress. Half of them will believe me, no matter what you say. Your wife will."

She would, Denny's young husband thought grimly. She'd punish Ann, too. He held his head between his hands and thought, not of Ann's last absurd remark, but of her. She began again. "We're both very young, Nat. You're older than I am, but not much. We're younger than Denny. We ought to help each other out when things get too much for us. Oh Nat, don't you see that this is decent and kind, and the other is horrible? My little dear, you must see it. I shall be so proud if you'll use me. I don't think I can bear it if you won't. It would be a frightful snub."

"Ann," Nat said desperately, "can't you realise that if I loved you, I wouldn't risk you."

Ann closed her eyes. "If you loved me you wouldn't think twice," she said briefly. "You'd take me and say thank you."

"I suppose that's true," Nat muttered. He looked at her absently. "Nothing could be horrible if you were in it," he said. "You make everything pleasant . . . All right, Ann."

"When will you want me?"

"Very soon. Promise me that if you feel frightened when you think it over you'll tell me at once."

Ann spoke with a little gasp. "If we don't move out of this sun, I shall faint."

"Oh Ann, what a fool I am. Forgive me." He rushed her away just as the park attendant came along. It looked like a flight, and the man might have been forgiven for the acerbity of his remarks when he had pursued them into the shade. Ann rallied under them and spoke to him sweetly. He was an unpleasant fellow, probably a wilful supporter of Lenin and a hanger of old ladies on lamp-posts and a spiker of them on park railings, and the fact that Ann had no money and Nat only a penny not unnaturally prejudiced him against her. The day was going badly for youth when Nat found sixpence in the lining of his coat. After that Nat took Ann home. He felt a villain and very cheerful. His mother was hovering mysteriously on the staircase when they came in. She drew Nat into the library and shut the door.

"Darling," she said. "I'm not going to say another word against Denny. I daresay she knows her own mind best, and nothing is more trying than a moody husband. But do you think she really wants to get rid of you? Suppose you were to offer to take her on a long holiday. I haven't told anyone yet, but an old friend has just died and left me two hundred pounds, bless her. There's nothing I need. I'd much rather give the money to you and Denny. She's not so clever as she seems, and a holiday together might put everything right and save you having to go through this awful business."

"Denny doesn't want me," Nat said gently. "It's quite finished, my dear, and nothing could put it right. I can think off-

hand of a dozen things you need, a coat, a dress, a pair of shoes and new stockings, and some money in your purse . . . I don't mind what you say about Denny, really. It's just that you never liked her, and it's all over." He pressed his forehead against the window.

"I won't say anything about her again," Emily said.

CHAPTER xiv

NAT and Ann arrived at a small cathedral town at seven o'clock in the evening. Nat wrote: "Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel Grimshaw" in the hotel register and they followed the proprietress up the wide shallow staircase to their rooms, two communicating bedrooms looking over a paved court. When she had gone they fell into each other's arms with cries of joy. Their suitcases stood side by side in the middle of the floor. Nat carried his into the smaller room and came back.

"This is a nice place." He sighed happily. "I like it, Ann."

After dinner, they walked in the cathedral close; they looked affectionately at the old houses, not one like its neighbour, but all sunk in the kind quiet air as its trees were sunk in the ancient turf. An old magnolia had climbed over the pediment of one wide lichenized house, and on the wall of another they discovered a fig-tree gnarled into the likeness of a patriarch. Here were the Middle Ages, grown soft and gracious, the fierce blood cooled in their veins. It ran slowly, and where there had been trumpets were only echoes, falling.

"Nothing like England in the world," Nat said. "I daresay this is what we fought for, without knowing it. I could live here."

"What about your great works?" Ann asked unkindly.

He smiled at her. "Oh Ann, I shall never do anything great..."

When Ann was in bed, she called him to come in. He leaned on her bed and she said: "Everything's going to be all right, my Nat."

"Is it?"

"Yes. Don't worry. Good-night."

"Good-night, Ann."

He slept all night, a thing which had not happened to him for a long time, with a sense of ease and comfort, as if Ann's little body, lying in the next room, were protecting him. When he woke, Ann was already up. He heard her voice outside in the corridor. She came into his room.

"Nat, our maid is called Agatha. She doesn't think anything of this town. Give her Portsmouth and she's yours for life. I'm going to leave her the remains of my bath salts. She likes them, and they'll keep my memory sweet until she finds us out. How beautiful you are in pyjamas, Nat. I knew you would be. You're such an adorable size."

He found that he had forgotten his dressing-gown and borrowed Ann's. Outside the bathroom he met Agatha. As he skulked past her he hoped she would remember him, but he could not bring himself to eye her boldly. In his bath the thought struck him that Denny would be furious if his stratagem failed because Agatha did not remember him, and he laughed loudly. He hurried Ann through her breakfast and out into the sunny street. "We've got five hours," he said. "Time enough to sit on a hill and look at England. Come along, my girl."

Outside the little town the road climbed steeply between trees. From a green ridge they saw five western counties, meadow, half-grown corn, streams, hills, woods and villages, the immemorial pattern of the land. They sat side by side in deep content.

"Aren't you glad now that you came out of it alive, Nat?"

Nat sprawled face downwards on the grass. "I'm only half alive . . . Everything seems a little flat since the war. One had every emotion then in such concentrated form that nothing will ever be so sharp and clear again . . . You know, Ann, I was happy in the war. To read the war books you'd think no one en-

joyed it except me and that it was all a bloody disgusting mess. It was bloody and it was disgusting, and if I shut my eyes I can see things I'd be torn in two rather than describe them to you. And yet it was a good life and I enjoyed it. The only other time I've been happy in that way was once in Scotland when Daniel had a shoot near Aviemore and I and another boy in the party (we must both have been about twelve) were lost on Cairngorm in a mist. I was frightened out of my wits and unspeakably thrilled and happy. I felt alive and exalted beyond anything I can tell you." He stopped, unable to find words for his most profound belief. The imminent possibility of sudden and violent death and the sharing of danger and hardship in the company of men, was something life should have, unless it were to become dull and edgeless, only half a life.

"But not war," Ann said. "Never war again. Emily and I couldn't bear you to go again."

Nat sat up. "I shouldn't have the nerve for another war. You're quite right. War's the wrong way to get that sort of thing. It's too big and beastly and noisy and generally imbecile. Some things that happened turn me *sick*. After all this time. And yet—I enjoyed myself. I was happy." He paused, and left Ann so far outside his life that she felt cold in the hot sun. "Some things are unbearable. The waste of decent men. The men's faces before the attack. Moments when one felt ready to die oneself to spare them what was coming to them. War's a blind, bloody, wasteful mess. But I'll never have anything like it again . . . We are the lost generation, the ones whose first youth was bitten out by the war. We've lost time, and the expectation of great events. We've had our greatest event. We're lost and restless in a world that changed when we had our backs to it. Most of us are dead and the rest undone. We are the lost generation."

*"King Pandion he is dead,
All thy friends are lapp'd in lead,"*

Ann said dreamily.

Nat gave her a friendly glance. "You let me talk too much, Ann. You never talk, do you?"

"Who is your best friend, Nat?"

"You are. One man I—loved, was scythed in half near Hamel. The other let me down."

Ann nodded. "You mean George Savill."

Nat said hurriedly: "It wasn't over Denny that he first let me down, but over the war. I discovered then that our minds didn't fit. I'd always thought they fitted to a hair. The truth is that when I was at Oxford I had no mind to speak of . . . You can't make an intimate friend of an *embusqué*. It's like asking an ordinary man to make a friend of a court eunuch. Half the time the fellow wouldn't know what you were talking about."

Ann said nothing, and Nat sat nursing his knees. Suddenly he broke out: "You're the bravest and kindest creature in the world. This has been perfect happiness for me. Tell me about yourself. You never do. You haven't minded this?"

Ann looked at him and said serenely: "But, Nat, I couldn't mind it. I love you."

She saw Nat's slight form stiffen. "You needn't think about it, Nat darling. It doesn't hurt me."

"Oh Ann," Nat said. He turned round to look at her, and she showed him a resolute small face and a mouth trembling into smiles. He said: "Ann" again, and flung himself down with his head on her thin knees. "Don't love me, Ann. I'm not in love with you. Oh, does that hurt you?"

He felt her wince and steady herself. "It's all right, Nat."

"It isn't," Nat cried passionately. "I ought to love you. Any man would. I'm a fool. I'm finished for all that sort of thing."

Can you understand? I can't be in love with you." Ann took his head between her hands. "Never mind, my lamb, what does that matter to us? I can go on loving you. You like to be loved, don't you?"

"Yes." He was so nearly inaudible that she had to stoop over him.

"By me?"

"Yes." Nat sat up. He looked at her darkly and blindly. Ann did not know what to make of that dark searching.

"What do you want, my sweet?"

"Only to be quiet," Nat said and put both arms round her so that she had to support him, with his face pressed into her shoulder. She sat for a long time, enduring Nat's dreadful blind clinging. She knew that he was not even thinking of her. Her happiness was deeper and more poignant than that of any happy lover. She felt herself a woman, far wiser and stronger than the girl she had been until a moment or two ago. How easy it would be to look after this hurt restless Nat, and how little, while he needed her, she cared whether he loved her or not. Nat released her abruptly and stood up.

"Come, Ann, we must go," he said brusquely. She got obediently to her feet, but they had only gone a few steps when Nat stopped again and took her hand. "I've just remembered something that helps. Did you ever read the letter from Dorothy Osborne to her future husband where she calls love 'a passionate kindness'? If it is, you have your lover, Ann."

Ann kissed him, and they hurried on, to pay their bill and catch their train. Sitting opposite him in the crowded carriage, Ann smiled at him with a delicate assurance. Nat stared out of the window and thought with a new dizzy grief of Denny and of all that dear enchantment vanished and of the war. He thought Ann looked very small and lonely when he remembered

her. The train stopped at Salisbury and he bought her a cup of tea to atone for his neglect.

At Waterloo he put her in a taxi and stood for a moment feeling this a poor ending. He wanted to thank and comfort her. "Is it all right, Ann?" Ann's lips brushed his fingers as they rested on the edge of the window. "Will you have dinner with me in Queen Street tomorrow?" . . . "Does Mrs. Clemens mind?" . . . "Everyone likes you, Ann." But words were no use; he could do nothing for her.

He took himself home by tube. As he came out into the street again he saw his uncle and Miss Coyle-Read. Daniel caught sight of him at the same moment and frowned. Nat was hurrying past when the girl put out her hand.

"Haven't we met?"

"I don't think so," Nat said, amused. A familiar impulse to annoy Daniel pricked him into mischief. "Except for a moment at the L.I."

"I meant then," she said placidly. "I recognised your father, Lord Grimshaw's brother." She gave Daniel his title with an ironic smile, as if it were a joke between them. She was not a very well-mannered young woman, but she knew how to pick up her feet, an action which Nat admired both in women and horses. She beckoned a taxi, was in it before it stopped, had waved to Daniel and had vanished before Nat found time to remember his own manners. His uncle's eyes examined him unkindly, from his shabby country clothes to his bag.

"Why the devil don't you dress better?" he demanded. "You're a disgrace to the family. Young men nowadays have no sense of decency. I owed my tailor for five years at a time when I was your age rather than go about as you do. I wouldn't give my gardener that suit."

"If you'll sponsor me with your tailor?" Nat said sweetly. He

admired Daniel's elegance enormously. "And if I had your figure, sir—" he added.

Daniel grunted. "I do four miles round my bedroom on my stomach every morning," he said grimly.

"Good God, sir, I can't find mine," Nat said cheerfully. "It's shrunk from disuse."

Daniel's handsome face softened. "It's no use reminding you that you have a good job, Nat?"

"Not a bit. Thanks very much all the same."

"You'd better come and have some dinner at my club."

"In these clothes, sir?"

Daniel twinkled. "Are they all you have? Very well. I shall probably have to resign."

He stood Nat an excellent meal. "The club has a really admirable *Montrachet*," he said. "We will have it, but I should like you to try as well a glass of a white Hermitage they've just brought up. It has a not uningenuous merit, very clean and sharp." He watched the boy's face as he tasted the *Montrachet*. "You like it?"

"It's marvellous, sir."

"Ah," said his uncle, "I'm delighted to find you agree with me. Some of the members hardly appreciate a wine of its transcendental delicacy. It has breeding, what one might call *race*." He filled up Nat's glass. At the end of the meal he consulted him on the choice of a port, a subtle flattery pointed for Nat by the memory of his stolen bottle. Port drunk in a tooth-glass is a sordid orgy; port after a dinner such as Nat had just eaten may be what Daniel called it: "a sufficient answer to those effeminate and un-English decriers of a wine which they are not man enough to comprehend, and an incomparable conclusion to a good start."

Nat was feeling very well. It was a long time since he had eaten a meal which gladdened his heart and fed his self-respect

at the same time. He felt that he had acquitted himself not too badly as a connoisseur. He took one of his uncle's cigars and listened dreamily while Daniel talked. Daniel on his feet at a political meeting used every weapon of the adroit controversialist. He possessed every weapon, even the least honourable, and used them all. Daniel talking in his club, and to his acquaintances—he had no intimates—had a singularly guileless and winning manner. He paid his listeners the staggering compliment of not choosing his words. He could talk like a fool or a very young man or like a witty woman.

He was just back from a Conference at Spa. He told Nat that the Germans were trying to wriggle out of their liabilities, and spoke severely about Herr Stinnes. "The fellow's nothing but a Boche," he said bitterly. He had little that was very kind to say about his French colleagues, who seemed to him a race of Catos, at any moment capable of demanding the instant deletion of Berlin. And when he came to the Poles, who had appeared at the Conference to beg for help in their Russian war, he could hardly contain himself. "They remind me of the Irish," he said gloomily. "There was a fellow called Grabski. I think he was their Lloyd George. *Grabski*." He seemed to think the name a peculiarly nasty and sinister form of insult. "I daresay they chose him on purpose. How can you carry on a civilised conversation with a fellow called Grabski?"

"I think my father knows him, sir."

"He *would*," Daniel said. "I'm a plain man myself, with the outlook of a plain man." Suddenly he smiled engagingly at Nat. "I say," he said mysteriously, leaning forward, "whatever should we have done if they'd handed the Kaiser over to us? A fine Salome I should have made, dancing before the Supreme Council, with his head on a charger. Gad, what a spectacle."

Nat was betrayed into a shout of mirth. "Your stomach exercises would have come in useful, sir."

Daniel laughed boyishly. "You're right. They would. But when you come to my age, Nat, you will be taking precautions."

Later, when Nat was recovering his disreputable suitcase from the porter's lodge, the thought struck him that he had succumbed very easily to his uncle's notorious charm. Daniel having laid himself out to fascinate, it had come off as quickly with his nephew as it did with political opponents. "Be damned to him and his charm," Nat said angrily, and then felt a little ashamed of himself. After all, Daniel need not have bothered with him. There must have been spontaneous kindness in it. "The old boy took me to his club in these shocking clothes," he thought remorsefully.

It occurred to him that his father and Daniel, who appeared to have no single quality in common, had at least one. Both brothers had the rare gift of rousing love and hatred; but Daniel worked for his effects and James achieved them without effort, against his will. Both men were better loved by their wives than most men contrive to be. Nat thought with quick affection of his Aunt Fanny. When she was in one of her worst and most unmanageable rages, Daniel could soothe her at once. As soon as he had said: "But Fanny," in the voice he did not use outside her room, she was quiet. His fierce loyalty to her had absorbed all his other loyalties; he would let down colleagues, allies, whole nations, but never by so much as a stray thought had he let Fanny down since she lost any chance a woman may have of defending herself against an unfaithful husband. When he told Fanny what he had been doing at his Ministry he did not suppress all the mean and self-profitable of his acts, he forgot them. They would not have occurred to the man he became in Fanny's bedroom, and so they ceased entirely to exist from the moment when, sitting on the edge of her bed, he began to talk to her about himself . . . Nat suddenly remembered Miss Elizabeth Coyle-Read. He hoped fervently that this somewhat fliberty

young woman was not a serious menace to his aunt. He did not think she could be; it was more likely that she was one of Daniel's manœuvres. She was certainly pretty and could jump—she probably inherited this attraction from her mother, whose jumps, in the hunting field and over the backs of sofas, had been admired by four generations of rising young politicians—but she was a poor thing to break up the long friendship of Daniel Grimshaw with his wife. . . .

Ann came to dinner. There were strawberries again. There were also sponge fingers, the remains of a teaparty given by the first floor. Mrs. Clemens was above small scruples. She would not, quite apart from her dislike of the first floor, have eaten one of his sponge fingers herself, but she had no hesitation in filling out Nat's party with them.

Ann gave no one reason to think that she expected to be kissed. She slipped into her place at the window end of the table and smiled at Nat as if that were all she had come to do. When Mrs. Clemens had cleared away they sat, divided by the table, and looked at each other. Nat was in an odd state of mind. He had written and sent off to his wife the absurd formal letter dictated by his lawyers telling her where to look for her evidence. Since then he had been walking about in a torment of doubt. He did not want Denny back. He hoped he would never see her again. And he was sure he did not want Ann. But when he saw her his mood changed. He would have liked to go back with her at once to the hotel outside the quiet close. He felt that he had lost everything he might have had there by talking too much and thinking about himself. If he and Ann were there again he would keep himself quiet. He would put his head between her little hands, and give her everything of his, his humiliations, his defeat, his bruised nerves, and all his doubts of himself.

“Ann,” he said, “do you still love me?”

"I adore you."

"You shouldn't. It makes me want to run away with you."

He wanted to tell her that she made him feel dishonest. "It's all so unfair," he said at last.

"Nat," Ann said, "why do you think about it so much? There's nothing to make you. It comes to this, that I love you with all myself, and want to help you, and you only love me with what's left after being sorry about your wife, and busy with your work. I don't mind. Why do you? Dear, dear, dearest Nat, don't send me away. Let me go on doing what I can for us both."

Nat got up and squeezed himself round the table to her chair. He had to kneel on the floor to avoid the bookshelves on the wall over her head. He put his head on her knee and his arms round her waist. "I don't want you to go away."

"Then nothing else matters."

"How much do you love me, Ann?"

"I don't know. The moodier you are and the worse you behave the more I love you. Even that's not quite true, because I can't help myself. And you do need me, don't you?"

"Oh I do," Nat said quietly. "I'd like to take you away for a long time. We'd be utterly happy. I'd make you happy."

"You do," Ann said. "By existing."

"Oh Ann, don't think too much of me. I'm no good to you. Let me tell you about Denny. I loved her altogether, I never thought of anyone else, I never wanted anything except for her. Does it hurt you to be told about it? Now that I've lost her and don't love her at all, I'm only half a man, in that way. I like you to comfort me and touch me. I'd like you to put your hands all over me. But I don't want to marry you. I'd like to go away with you, and be quiet, and hear your little voice talking on—when you do stoop to mere words—and see you smile at me. You're such a dear child. But I should forget to kiss you, and I

should never make love to you. Ann dear, don't be hurt. Don't mind. You're everything I want now and I'm nothing you want. I'm nothing at all . . . I'm older than you are, too."

"You're only twenty-five, Nat, and you're nothing but a baby. A funny miserable bad-tempered baby. Emily says so and I agree."

"I'm not bad-tempered."

"Your wife told Fanny you had a positively evil nature," Ann said demurely.

"Ann!" Nat caught her up and kissed her. He knocked his head on the shelf. "You wicked child. You horrid little girl." Locked in each other's arms, they laughed together. Their laughter ran through them in little shocks of pleasure. Nat said: "You dear, you dear. Let's go for a walk now, Ann. I've been indoors for a year."

They went out to walk in the Park. Nothing ever happened to them during their walks, but Nat always came back with the feeling that he had assisted at an adventure. Ann could be enchanted by such small things. Besides which, it was summer. In those days (it was 1920) summer had not yet become a Euclidean point, without visible magnitude. Summer began to go out when Protocols and Fascism came in, and the skies like the Muse of history, now weep all the time. And now that it has left us, with all the other good things, peace, Edwardian London, the music halls, Devonshire House, Strauss waltzes, quiet country roads, and leisure, it is not everyone who can recall the authentic sounds and scents of a summer evening in London, children sprawling on the yellowed grass, plane trees rubbing their brittle leaves together like a choir of grasshoppers, the languid air folding down on the streets, thinning and muffling all their noises, so that a hurdy-gurdy playing in the gutter has the shrill sweetness of a flute, Thessaly in Oxford Street. Strauss still lives in a gramophone, but summer, oh summer in England, is lost.

The people in the Park were sleepy, they sat languidly on green chairs, and lay on the grass. The very bandsmen drooped, like geraniums after a hot day, and a violet haze crowned the city behind the trees.

They were a queer young couple, she nearly as shabby as he, since Fanny forgot for months together to give her any money and Ann would not ask for it.

"I don't think I shall go back to Oxford," she said suddenly. "Why not?"

"It means nothing to me. And I shouldn't see you for such a long time."

"I don't see what Oxford could mean to a woman," Nat said placidly, "but don't give it up on my account."

Ann looked up into his face and laughed at him.

"If you look at me like that I shall kiss you," Nat said furiously. "I shall break your miserable thin obstinate little body in two pieces and throw them into the Serpentine with the false sneer still on your face."

Ann blushed. She slid a hand into Nat's and looked at him out of the corner of her eyes. "Very well," she murmured.

"You're beautiful," Nat said, sighing.

When he took her home he stepped into the cool empty hall and held her lightly by the shoulders, smiling. A door shut on the landing above; Ann kissed him exultantly and hurried away . . .

Fanny rang him up in the morning to ask him to take her to the theatre. He presented himself at seven o'clock in St. James's Place, at that hour still the only place in London to which the youthful Disraeli might return without realising that he has been a long time dead. He found Fanny not strong enough to sit in her box. She ordered Nat and Ann to go alone, but on a glance from Ann, Nat declined. So they had dinner in Fanny's room, with Fanny sitting sideways in her pillows. Her face had

been delicately made up for the theatre; its haggard beauty was disturbing. There was thunder in the air and Fanny was afraid of it. She had all the windows closed and the blinds drawn against lightning. When a crash sounded nearer than the last she gave a little scream and shut her eyes. The closed room grew intolerably hot, and Nat set the door ajar on to the well of the landing, but no air came in that way.

He was looking at that oblong patch of darkness when his wife's face appeared in it. He jumped crazily. Fanny saw her at the same moment and said indignantly: "What on earth are you doing there, my good girl? Come in or go away."

Denny pushed open the door and came in, shutting it behind her. "I told them you were expecting me," she murmured.

"I was expecting to be struck by lightning," Fanny said.

Denny sat down. "Do you remember the last time we sat here, Nat?" she said.

"Better than you do." With a queer pang of grief he recognised his nineteen-year old self standing beside her, tortured by delight and longing; he could almost smell the scent she wore on the afternoon of his mother's dreadful party. He saw Ann move her chair until the curtains of his aunt's bed hid her. "Do you want me to go away, Denny?" he asked formally.

"Of course I don't. I came about you. It would be no use going to your mother, but I thought perhaps your aunt could make you realise that I can't go on living on three pounds a week."

"It's all I have for myself," Nat said. "I pay the rent of the flat for her, you know, Fanny darling."

Fanny waved her hands. "Don't appeal to me. I don't encourage your wife," she said angrily, "unless you call giving her a dress and four pots of jam any encouragement. I think she ought to live with you and look after you. It's disgraceful."

Nat smiled unkindly. "Do you want to live with me, Denny? You're prettier than ever, you know."

"Certainly not," Denny said in her smooth voice. "No woman could live with you. But I can't live on air."

"I know you don't . . . I thought you were—being helped," Nat said. He wiped his forehead, on which drops of sweat had gathered. "This room is stifling, Fanny. Do let me open a window."

An inopportune crash of thunder answered him. Despairingly he turned to his wife. "I let you have all I can spare. Are you sure no one is helping you?"

"I shouldn't think of taking money from anyone," Denny stated.

"I don't know why you shouldn't."

"You take it from Nat," Fanny said. "Why should you be so particular?"

"Nat is my husband, aunt Fanny."

"Then why don't you live with him?" Fanny cried triumphantly. "In my days a wife considered that she had duties. If you can't live with Nat why do you live on him? You have no spirit."

"Please keep quiet, darling," Nat said. "I must look after my wife. But I can't give her what I haven't got."

"You could go into your uncle's firm," Denny pointed out.

"Where did you get that idea?"

"From your uncle Daniel," his wife said complacently. "I went to him for help last week, and he said there was no reason why you shouldn't help yourself."

Nat stood up. He was so angry that he had begun to tremble violently. Cold drops of sweat ran down his body. "I think I was never so angry in my life," he said deliberately. "If you go to Daniel again I'll not give you another penny. I promise you."

"Nat!" Fanny shrieked. "You look like a murderer. Oh, the lightning! I can see it through the blinds. We shall all be struck

dead because of you. Close the shutters. Ann. Ann. Where are you? Close the shutters. Nat! *Darling!*"

"I can't stay any longer," Nat gasped. "You'll excuse me, Fanny. This room is—so—hot."

He opened the door and staggered noisily down the stairs. In the hall he leaned against the curve of the banisters. Ann was with him so quickly that he thought she must have slid down them.

"Denny is explaining to Fanny how you behave at breakfast and Fanny is telling her that she must have brought it on herself."

"Leave me alone, Ann." He seemed to fall an immense distance and found himself sitting on the lowest stair.

"Are you all right now?" Ann hung over him, crying. Her tears fell over his face. She was holding him up. "Let me come with you, Nat. I don't want to leave you tonight. Please let me stay with you."

"Do you want us to run away together?" the boy muttered.

Ann's arms tightened about his chest. Nat twisted round in them.

"I can't breathe, Ann, let me go . . . I couldn't take you away now or at any other time. Besides—I don't want to." He felt Ann turn away from him; she backed against the wall and stood there, watching him. "You couldn't stand it. You'd get tired of me, as my wife did . . . I'm sorry. I know I thought differently last night."

"I shall never be tired of you, Nat." Ann said quietly.

"Oh," Nat groaned. "Leave me alone, Ann. I'm tired. I can't do anything for you; I can't do anything for my wife or for anyone else. I don't want to. I want to go on with my work in peace. You must let me alone." He wondered stupidly whether Ann were as pale as she seemed. "Are you going to be ill, Ann?" Ann shook her head. He thought he had never known a house so

silent. "Last night," he began again, and stopped. "Can't you see what you're asking? I don't love you nearly enough to make it a decent thing to do. You'd let me help myself to your generosity. You'd comfort me and put up with me. Don't you think better of yourself? I couldn't be so careless of you. You're being *childish*."

He saw that Ann was going away. She said; "Don't be angry, Nat. I won't worry you again." Her voice struck Nat over the heart. "Oh I'm not angry, my love," he cried loudly. He flung an arm round her and held her so closely that neither of them could breathe. When he let her go he marched off without looking back and banged the door behind him. I've made things worse than ever, he thought despairingly. Oh Ann, you silly child . . . A cool delicious rain had begun and before he reached Queen Street the gutters were running down like country brooks. His spirits rose. Pulling off his soaked clothes he fell into bed, and dreamed that he was at Saints Rew. The old house took him sleeping into its arms. He lay as still there as if he had died, the youngest thing the house had left.

CHAPTER xv

HE did not see Ann for a week. He thought that probably she had given him up, and though he missed her, he was preparing to let her go with a sigh, when she spoke to him on the telephone. His heart quickened.

“Ann, where are you?”

“In Daniel’s library. I want you to ask me to lunch.”

“I do. Your voice is very small and nervous. Do you hate me, Ann?”

A faint sound, like a sigh, came through space.

“Ann?”

“I love you.”

“Oh, bless you. Where would you like to lunch?”

“Somewhere cheap,” Ann said thoughtfully. “I’ll come for you.”

He found her waiting for him in Exhibition Road. She came towards him uncertainly. Pity and love together smote him so hard that he could only say: “Come along,” and putting his hand under her arm he hurried her across the road. “Why have you been leaving me alone, Ann?”

“At first I thought I should have to give you up,” Ann said. “I thought I couldn’t go on. And then I couldn’t bear that either. You don’t want to be given up, do you?”

“No. I don’t. Do you want to give me up?”

“You take a lot of keeping, darling Nat.” Ann smiled joyously. “You’re worth it.”

“Only to you, my little love. Where shall we lunch?”

"Daniel has just given me some money," Ann said. "We'll lunch very well, thanks to him. He gave it to me for stockings, but what are clothes compared with food? Nothing to you. And I like watching you eat. Will the *Café Royal* do? It's a five-pound note."

It will seem incredible to a post-war generation—it was nearly incredible to Nat and Ann—that the *brasserie* of the *Café Royal* was once the lair of a fine sturdy hairy bohemianism. In those days it must have resembled one of the superbly curving women who gladdened the eye in the palmy days of the music hall, bounding with vitality, gloriously vulgar, noisy, and warm-hearted, and full of play. Today, with its staid cosmopolitan clientèle, it has more of the chilling correctness of a self-made dowager, a little as if Marie Lloyd (on whom be peace) had married into the peerage and lived up to it. Nevertheless, it still provides the finest veal and ham pie in Christendom, a filling and succulent meal, unbeatable in its class.

"I have a good reason for asking you to lunch with me," Ann said, "but I was going to ask you without one. I was going to tell you that you're never to think, because I'm in love with you, that you ought to be kind to me and do things for me."

"I'm not kind to you, Ann, am I?"

"Sometimes you're too kind."

He set his teeth. "That got home, Ann."

"Don't, my lamb," Ann whispered. She smiled at him with an exquisite gentleness. "I didn't mean it to. I ought to leave you to yourself, but I can't because you don't really want to be left alone. But you must be happy about me, or I can't go on."

"You're not happy."

"Yes I am. I adore you . . . You look so worried, darling Nat. Please believe me. I don't want you to do anything for me. I promise you."

Nat was suddenly amazed by the young girl's serenity. Shy,

sensitive, yielding, and tenacious as the devil—her long silences, her smiles, hid her from him as completely as if she had been able to use every defence of an experienced woman. Her childish body was a sheath for the most immovable obstinacy. Time and again, during the past weeks, he must have hurt and racked her, but she rarely showed a sign of it and she had not given in . . . He came out of a perplexed silence to a realisation of Ann sitting at his side, very still, her hands folded in her lap. He touched one of them and saw the colour rise in her face. It startled him, that he could move her so quickly, and again he felt his body burning with pity and admiration.

“Ann,” he said under his breath, and gripped her hand until she had to bite her lip to keep back a cry. “Ann. Love.”

Ann smiled radiantly. “Now talk,” she whispered. “Tell me what you’re doing.”

“I can’t. You know all about me already. Ann, will you marry me—when it’s all over?”

Ann did not look at him. “Do you suppose you’ll like that?”

“I’d like to have you with me all the time . . . I shall be a rotten and unsatisfactory husband, Ann.” He wondered whether she understood him at all, and if she would mind. “You comfort me. And I want that so much,” he said desperately. “It’s all damned unfair—to you. I get everything out of it, and you nothing . . .” He smiled at her very sweetly. “If you turn me down, I shall burst into tears and be removed . . . I’m a fool, your fool. Don’t have anything to do with me, Ann love.”

Ann glanced at her fool’s young face, lined and scored by fatigue. “I shall have to marry you some time,” she said unsteadily. “I’ve been running after you so long I could hardly look myself in the face if you didn’t have me.”

“Let’s get out of this,” Nat whispered. “I must kiss you at once.”

He was paying their bill, with Daniel’s money, when Ann

seized his arm. "I'd forgotten my reason," she said in a dismayed voice.

"You don't need reason now," Nat said. "Hurry."

"We can't. It's about Daniel." She looked at him doubtfully. "You'll never be able to persuade me that Daniel is a villain. I like him."

"That's no proof. You like me."

Ann brushed this aside. "He told Fanny yesterday that your father had got himself into a mess and might even have to stand his trial for treason. It sounds mediæval, but there was Case-
ment—"

"What the devil d'you mean, Ann?" Nat said violently.

Ann turned pale. "I think Daniel is—arranging something. He actually relishes a scene. And he distrusts your father . . . For Emily's sake, Fanny tried to find out what was happening and he said she must wait. That hurt Fanny. She said she had not realised how very old she was growing."

Nat frowned. "You ought to have told me this at once," he said briefly. "I think I'll go down to Saints Rew. If we're quick I can catch the afternoon train and be there before dark." All at once, he felt that he ought to have gone before. He had stayed away from Saints Rew too long. Anything might have happened to it . . .

Ann came with him to the station. She stood under the window of his carriage, without speaking. "I shall come back in a day or two." Nat said hurriedly. He had just remembered that he had never kissed her. Doors were slamming all down the train. Ann fixed her eyes on his face. Suddenly he said: "Come with me, Ann."

"How can I?"

"Come." Nat was shaken by a queer excitement. He swung open the door. "You must. I want you."

Ann stepped in as the train moved off. She was still very pale.

"Sit down," Nat murmured. "Sit down and rest. Oh my little love, how good you are." In the empty carriage, he bent down and kissed her hands, which she held clasped together on her thin young knees. . . .

They reached Saints Rew just before dusk. Nat had not wired, and they covered the six miles from the junction in a dissipated fly which he stopped at the gates. "Six miles in two hours," he groaned. "I can't sit still another minute. Do you mind, Ann?"

They followed slowly the edge of the park. Ann was tired and once she sat down on the short turf and shut her eyes. High above them the air was faintly powdered with gold, and the wings of homing birds glinted in it as they wheeled. When they plunged into the green tunnel of the limes it smelled not of limes but of late honeysuckle in the hedge, breathing scent from innumerable small tawny throats. A hundred yards from the house Nat stopped to show Ann a small gap in the trunk of a tree. "I used to hide in here and talk to myself," he said reminiscently. Thrusting his hand in among the layers of old leaves he came on a green-mouldered penny for which a child had searched frantically, with tears of despair. Ann refused to laugh at the desperate little ghost. She offered to buy the penny, and after a struggle with her pocket produced an old purse and half-a-crown. "I have an ivory knight and a note-book you gave me at the same time," she said cheerfully, "if you don't think this a fair exchange."

"How long have you been in love with me?" Nat demanded.
"Ever since."

"Why wasn't I told about it?"

"You rushed off and married Denny while I was still growing up," Ann pointed out. "You're so impatient, Nat."

Nat did not answer. The trees made a darkness round them, and with surprise and despair he found himself slipping back

through his life. For a brief second he was Denny's boyish lover again, making her stand here to listen to the limes—faint and dizzy and wild with longing. He seized Ann's hand. "Come along," he said. "We mustn't stay here."

Emily was in the hall when they came in. She scolded Nat furiously for not writing, and as he went upstairs he heard her already at the telephone, talking to Fanny. He stood still to listen. "Oh darling, he's come down. Ann's with him. *Of course* I don't know what they're doing. Do I ever know anything? No one cares what I think. No one cares if I'm alive or dead . . . The boy looks tired to death. It's that dreadful wife of his. I hate her. . . . And Ann looks like a ghost. Oh darling, isn't it all *dreadful!* What are people coming to, rushing about the country without any warning? Where did he get the train fare! I expect Ann travelled *under the seat.*" Nat walked softly to his room and shut the door on his mother's voice. It woke too many echoes. They beat against him as if they would break the walls of his body.

When he had dressed he went to talk to Emily. She was in her own sitting-room, leaning on the window, the curtains parted to let in the evening air. She stood there as if she had paused in her room on her way elsewhere, to Nat's room to see if old Rose had drawn the bed, to the great drawing-room to catch a glimpse of her James standing between one century and the next, between a Stuart couch and a tallboy of Sarah Churchill's, to the little room at the end of the corridor, where she would stand for a long time at the out-curving window, with an air of expectation, rather off-hand and careless, as of a child prepared in advance against the incomprehensible disappointments of a grown-up world. What did she expect to see approaching her down the avenue of limes, which all through the summer day filled this room with a greeny twilight so that it was more than ever like a ship's room, with the sliding water outside? Once

when Nat came on her there, she was singing to herself in her clear old voice. Muffled and airy, like notes struck from yellowed keys, *In Old Madrid* floated through the room. *Come, my love, I wait for thee.* It was as if the faded Victorian hangings had found a voice, as if Emily's youth were living on in the only things she had chosen for herself when she came to Saints Rew. Though they were inconceivably hideous curtains and spoiled the lovely line of the window, James let them stay. It was the only time Emily ever got the better of her house.

She turned round when Nat came into her sitting-room, and said seriously: "You know, Nat, it was all very well to drag your cousin Ann about the country-side at all hours of the day and night when she was a little girl—and how that child toiled after you, carrying everything, you little wretch, Nat, and coming in too exhausted to speak—but you're grown-up now and it's going to be very difficult to explain it to Daniel. She hasn't even brought a nightgown . . . I don't like lending my shabby old things to anyone," she said sorrowfully, disclosing her real grievance. "I had three dozen nightgowns, Nat, when I married your father, tucked and frilled, and I know I shall be buried in one of them. The one I've lent Ann is *damned yellow*. Every time Rose washes my things she massacres another of them. Anyone would think she'd turned Turk. When you were a very little boy you offered to buy me fifty red silk nightgowns as soon as you grew rich. I suppose I oughtn't to count on them?"

"Darling," Nat said gravely, "I have one wife and I shall soon have another—how on earth can I buy you red silk nightgowns?"

"Oh Nat," his mother wailed, "you mustn't marry again. It's too soon. You're worse than Rose."

"But if I married Ann?"

"You can't afford to marry anyone," Emily said severely. "Not even Ann. She wouldn't have you. Ann has too much

sense." She sighed. "If you smile at her like that, I suppose she will. Oh Nat, can't you afford a new dinner jacket? That one is green!"

Nat slid an arm round her and ruffled his hair against her cheek. Emily made him stand away where she could look at him. "My baby, you're too young to have two wives," she mourned. "Ann's a dear girl but she's a baby herself. Who's going to look after you both?"

"You might. We could live very well on omelettes," Nat said mischievously.

"Never again!" Hearing old Rose in the corridor she scurried out, to engage in an interminable colloquy that went on up and down staircases, in powder-closets, behind linen chests, like the sighing of a little wind let loose in the old house.

Nat followed her to look for his father, and found him in the great drawing-room. There were gaps on the white panelled walls from which paintings had been taken, and some pieces of furniture had gone, including the great globe of fine glass on its tulipwood stand. Its disappearance shocked Nat profoundly. He recalled the childish anguish with which, coming home alone in the dusk, he ran with pounding heart along the drive to the point where the house was first visible and then and not until then was satisfied that Saints Rew had not vanished, leaving him alone. He felt now as the child would have felt, reaching the fatal point and seeing no friendly refuge.

It seemed that James already knew everything about the affair Daniel. Old Raphael, half dead with age, grief, and liver trouble, and still in the Cabinet, had had himself conveyed, suffering tortures on the journey, to Saints Rew to warn James that he might be asked to resign from his clubs. It had got about that not only was he in close touch with the German court on the eve of war but in correspondence with an Austrian land-owner during it and had when the Peace Conference was sitting

supplied the Austrians, through his friend, with information relating to certain farm lands in dispute, of great value to them and of none to the Allies. The hanging matter of it was that it was all true. The Jew was the only person except the French premier, and an American who invited himself for a week and stayed only one night ("I expect he thought I was a *shabby* little man," said James), to come near Saints Rew, since his old colleagues in England were more nervous of James than of their late Allies. Cabinet Ministers publishing their memoirs wrote of him with a touching condescension or with great severity, according to their views on the chances of his rehabilitation later. Raphael stayed a week; a gardener pushed him about the park in a bath chair, with James trotting beside it. They discussed trees, death, and music, but by common accord kept off the settlement of Europe, James because he felt a certain delicacy in discussing with his friend a scandal for which the old Jew was partly responsible, and Raphael because James had not been asked to that party.

Nat walked up and down the room, raging dumbly against his helplessness. More light-hearted than ever, his father had begun to teach himself bridge. He played it very badly, with all the youthful rashness and impatience that he had suppressed in the service of his career. Nat did his dismayed best for him: he could do nothing to protect him against failure and disgrace, and so he felt all the more need to save the shabby little man from the ferocity of his future partners. "Of course if they turn the poor lamb out of his clubs, he can go on playing by himself to all eternity, but probably they'll leave him one," he said to himself. Patiently he played out James's hands for him and tried to inspire him with a respect for the laws of bridge which the old minister was quite incapable of feeling. He looked up twinkling, and said:

"I suppose that if I weren't turned out of my clubs for trea-

son, I should have to leave after cheating at cards. The demoralising effect of a life spent in diplomatic circles."

He had the air of delighting in his impersonation of old age and the tones of his voice took on an exaggerated mellowness. Nat would hardly have been startled if the lights had gone up and his father had retired to the green-room to take off his false wrinkles before appearing at an undergraduate revel. It occurred to him that James was almost the last of those grown-up and usually well-informed undergraduates who ruled in Europe right down to the death of good King Edward and have not yet all vanished from a scene at which they assisted with the portentous gravity of young men pretending to be old. Except that James Grimshaw had always known what he was about and had never been able to forget the deadly nature of the property swords.

Daniel was of a newer school. He played an excellent and perfectly honourable game of bridge but he cheated in politics and diplomacy as naturally as a pushing grocer puts sand in his sugar. He was fatal because he did not care who triumphed in Europe so long as he did. He was no Cato, demanding from motives of a bloody-minded patriotism the obliteration of an enemy nation. He was a patriot only in his own bosom. He would even come out in support of justice if his acute political sense warned him that the popular mind was veering that way. There are moments when the chivalry of the English, a sensitive and quick-tongued Desdemona not yet entirely stifled by the bolsters of newspaper proprietors, springs up in defence of a beaten enemy. Of such moments Daniel took the fullest advantage. He had protested sharply and publicly when the French, in defiance of the Treaty, occupied Darmstadt and Frankfurt in April. He would protest again if he judged the moment ripe for a generous gesture. (Officially a Liberal, he remembered now and then that he was pledged to govern by principles, and routing these out he made exuberant speeches in favour of abstract

justice and humanity while taking care that neither of these wraiths obscured his clear vision of his own future.) And he would join at once in any rapacious, foolish, or cowardly act directed against a suitably defenceless nation as soon as he saw that the moment of weak chivalry was past. If his grateful countrymen, instead of making him a peer, had granted him a Triumph like those accorded to victorious Roman generals, he would have taken care to tie to his chariot wheels only such victims as the populace were certain to hate at sight. He ran no risks of rousing sympathies that might turn against himself.

Emily at dinner was very severe on him. "Perhaps you'll explain to me," she said to James, "why no one ever praises a virtue unless it belongs to a thoroughly bad man. Most people are kind to dogs and parrots (ridiculous screeching birds, they drive me silly), but no one ever says how remarkable kindness is until it's a horrible murderer. Then they say: He was *kind to his parrot*, he must be good at heart. Daniel Grimshaw—Lord Grimshaw, if you please—is trying to ruin his brother, he behaves shamefully to my darling Labour people, he has murdered thousands of miserable little Austrian children, he tells lies and robs the poor, and all you can say is: Remember how kind he is to his *poor wife*. Why shouldn't he be kind to his wife? I've been sober and virtuous all my days and no one ever talks about my remarkable qualities. If I murder you, you'll all begin to cry: She was so good to robins, or, she was devoted to her cat. I've a good mind to turn my hands to crime this very night."

"You're the wickedest old lady I know," Nat said sweetly. "I'll tell you all something about her now. When she and I were living alone in that flat she told me one day that she lay quaking in her bed every time I came in late, thinking it might be a burglar. I asked her why she didn't come out to look and what do you think she said? She said: 'Well, I always think I might peep out and see you being sick into your top hat after some

dreadful orgy, so I stay where I am.' What d'you think of that for the mind of a virtuous old lady?"

"I suppose you think I don't know all about orgies," Emily said serenely. . . .

The lawn, when Nat and Ann walked across it, was barred and splashed with gold from the windows, but at the far side it became a velvet blackness under their feet. The night had a dark translucence, as if the ground were giving off its stored light. There was no moon and a faint dust of stars. Behind them the friendly downs flowed up and out from a solid darkness that was the trees at the back of the house, and in front the valley spread its few scattered lights. Two marked the road that climbed the hill and so went on between sleeping fields and past cottages and farms and small square churches until it came within sight of Winchester, which is a pleasant place for a road to come to by way of English lanes.

Nat lay on the lawn with his hands behind his head. All he could see of Ann, sitting near him with her back to an elm tree, was the pale blur of her face. He was very content to lie still with her near him. He did not want to touch her, but after a time he began to wish she would talk.

"Tell me what you think marriage will be like, Ann? Or don't you know?"

Ann stirred slightly. "Our marriage? . . . I shall manage everything, of course."

"Bless the child," Nat murmured, "shan't I be master in my own house?"

"Certainly not," Ann said placidly. "You shall be its spoilt child . . . It's lucky for you, Nat, that I have no ambitions, because I shouldn't give them up, and they'd probably have interfered."

Nat peered at her in alarm. "Don't let's be too domestic, Ann."

"I'm not at all domestic," Ann said calmly. "I can't cook and I like going to lectures. But I shan't bore you and I won't interfere. I'm sorry you're not going to do something I could help in, like politics, but I can leave you alone and not fuss you when you work yourself to death in your stinking lab."

"It's a nice lab," Nat said dreamily. "I wish I had one of my own . . . Ann, we shall never be rich. Do you mind? I could be. I could make a lot of money, and I don't want to. Are you sure you won't mind? I shan't even be specially good. I talked a good deal of nonsense to you the other night . . . You don't mind that, either, do you? . . . Before the late troubles I didn't know what I wanted to do; now I do know and I'm very nearly happy. You are a darling. You never let me feel I'm conceited or a fool. Ann, can we live on three hundred a year? I shall have that when Denny marries again, and until I'm through and can get a job. Perhaps they'd keep me on at South Kensington. Or we may get back to Oxford. You could indulge your perverted passion for lectures . . . would you like it?"

"Nat," Ann said in a low voice, "what did you mean to do when you came back from the war?"

"If my wife hadn't found me inadequate, you mean? Do you really want to know? I should have tried to make money—enough to give Denny what she wanted. She wanted Saints Rew, among other things. . . . I should have gone in with Daniel at once. I used to see her living in this house, with everything she wanted. I don't believe I had any ambitions then except to give Denny the sort of life she liked."

Ann said nothing at all. Nat sat up to look at her.

"You're thinking I ought to want to give you things," he said softly. "Isn't that it, Ann?"

Ann shook her head. "No." She pressed her hands on her chest. "I don't want any of those things."

Nat twisted himself round so that he could lie in her lap.

"Does your chest hurt you, my little love? Mine does, when I've been knocked out like that. . . . Oh Ann. Darling. . . . What must you think of me. I'm a damned fool."

"I'm all right," Ann said at last. "Are you comfortable where you are? . . . You're honest and I love you. I shall never think anything of you but that. What is the nicest thing you have ever thought about me, Nat?"

Nat reflected a moment. "I found an exact description of you the other day," he said. "It's about 'the learned *Savil's* heir,' whoever she may have been.

*So early wise, and lasting fair;
That none, except her years they told,
Thought her a child, or thought her old."*

His head in the curve of Ann's arm, Nat almost fell asleep. His whole body felt weak, as if his muscles were dissolving. The strain of the past months relaxed and with it his nervous strength. He laid his face against Ann's little body and shut his eyes in utter abandonment to his weariness. He felt content and serene. Ann shivered uncontrollably and he lay closer. Only when he began to feel how cold she was did he force himself to move.

They walked back towards the house, which as they approached it, drew to itself all the beauty and glamour of the night. If by day it was lovely, at night it was the very shape of loveliness, to which all these downs, these gentle English valleys, these hills and trout streams and folded villages, flowed and turned. The soft old turf came up to its walls, as if the very earth caressed it. Nat smelled southernwood in the darkness. He put his hand on the little bush that grew close to the door and broke a sprig. Instantly the darkness flowered; he recalled the ecstasy of hot August noons when he lay drowsing on the grass in this very place, baking his little body in the sun. No day was

too hot for the child and no afternoon long enough. He saw it all, the motionless trees, green turning to bronze, the sky, colourless, at white heat, a hawk dropping in it from an immense distance, hovering, quivering, striking, and the strident silence—silence visible—of the peonies on the edge of the lawn. The peonies must be there now. Nat looked across the lawn. They were sunk in the soft blackness. They blazed, and the hawk wheeled and struck, only in the sharp scent of the southernwood on his fingers. He touched the wall beside the door—it gave off a little warmth, the day's hoard—and held the door open for Ann to go in.

Emily heard them on the stairs and called. She was sitting in her room, trying frantically to cope with three days' newspapers. "It says here," she said indignantly, "that Daniel is to have the Grand Cordon of the Legion of Honour. They ought to strangle him with it. Instead of which some Frenchman who probably *loathe*s him, will kiss him on both cheeks and shout hurrah for the Allies, while hating us all. . . . It's very well for you to laugh, Nat, but I know what I'm talking about. Damned hypocrites, every one of them. Devils."

"Darling, you ought to be in bed."

"So ought you and so ought Ann," his mother retorted. "Ann, don't let him keep you up to all hours asking you to marry him. It's disgraceful. He has one wife. And don't marry him. No man is worth it."

"Someone must look after Nat," Ann said.

Emily sighed. "Why are women so absurd? Nat doesn't want to be looked after. He wants to be allowed to do what he likes, a very different affair. And you couldn't look after him, Ann. You're too young, and I'm sure I couldn't tell you what to do." She saw Ann interposing herself between Nat and the world. It was ridiculous and disturbing; there could not be enough warmth in Ann's small body to comfort Nat. She saw him

crouching over a tiny blaze, his face young and smooth in the firelight.

"You must go to bed, Ann," Nat said. "I've tired you out." He kissed the palms of her hands and closed her fingers over them. "Keep them safe," he murmured. Emily saw him give her a shy loving smile. She thought: "It can't be that I'm jealous of Ann." But they were both so young, and both beautiful. Emily felt worn and shabby; suddenly her mind showed her the long curtains in the end room. She felt that she must go at once to look at them. The windows might have been left open, exposing them to rain and the night dews. She hurried along the corridor, pausing an instant in Ann's room to say good-night. The great end window was shut and her curtains safe. She sank down on the window seat and began to finger the material, recalling how much she had paid for it, and herself, a young woman—she knew she had been pretty then—in the dark little shop (gas jets behind yellow globes) rushing with it to the door to get the colour and to snatch a glance at James waiting for her all impatience outside. It did not seem very long ago. Why, she had had no life. It had gone before anything had happened. Each year she had thought: Now it is coming, now something splendid, something very important is going to happen, the thing for which I have been living; she felt her life opening in her, like a flower, stem leaves and blossoms, it lifted and spread in an ecstasy of waiting. It was all over, her life was over, and after all there had been nothing. She had lived for nothing. . . .

Ann was wide awake. Emily had left her a stump of candle because of her childish fear of the dark. It flickered on her small serene face and on her sunbrowned hands, crossed over the folds and tucks of Emily's nightgown. She lay in bed and thought of Nat. It was rarely that she thought about anything else, since her life, except where it touched him, was dreamy and unsatisfy-

ing. She felt that she had no illusions about her lover. He was moody, irritable, and had withdrawn so far into himself since his wife failed him that anyone but Ann would have called him selfish or self-centred. She preferred him like this, much as a connoisseur will dwell lovingly on the imperfections of a cherished possession, and find an exquisite satisfaction in seeing beauty where the uninitiate would say: A flaw. Besides which, she felt that she could keep him in order. She knew Nat, she knew when to accept and when to pull him up sharply. It would be very easy, since she did not much care what Nat did, if he never told her lies. With lies she knew, this wise and very young woman, that she would not be able to cope. With anything else, disgrace, failure, but not lies told to her. She felt quite sure of being able to protect him. So long as she lived, so long as Nat loved her, she would be a refuge for him. He was safe in her.

With all her strength she vowed that Nat should never be too much hurt again. She felt invincible. The candle shrank in the light airs, and she began a search through her mind among the things for which she admired him. It was like trying to catch and fix forever in the memory the pattern of foam seen in the green lucent hollow of a wave. Perfect and enchanting lines and colours slide across, shape themselves, and change; Nat's fierce young profile against the light at some lost moment, an unimportant word folded carefully in her memory, a smile and an upward glance, not at her, at someone else, forgotten and the smile kept, an ivory knight. For a brief moment she saw all these together, then with thunder in her ears, the wave came down on her: her love for Nat, lifting her, blind and lost, swept her out.

Long before the candle came to its end Ann fell asleep. A large moth that had flown on to the pillow folded its wings over its head and slept too. The wind that had blown in Ann's hair slept. Nothing stirred in the room—you would need to bend

close to see the light movement of Ann's breath—until a delicate light began to well up through it. The windows faced west, and the light was a reflected one, from the still hidden sun. Then Ann stirred and smiled, without waking.

CHAPTER xvi

JAMES came up to town that month, to see the secretary of one of his clubs, and that one in no way impressive. He did not care much what the others did about him but he was persuaded that if this one chased him off its worn armchairs he would be a very poor, mean, and shabby little fellow indeed. He had decided to see his brother first, and he asked Nat to meet him at Daniel's house an hour or so before dinner. When Nat came he found his father in the library, waiting for Daniel. James was examining a new novel he had taken from a shelf. "What I do resent," he said to Nat, "is to be told that a young woman is delicate and lovely and then to be confronted by a badly smudged woodcut of a ferocious and unattractive female clad in a slop. I may be Victorian but I feel cheated."

"You've got hold of the limited edition, sir."

"Inexcusable at any price," James said, putting the book in its place.

Nat watched him in anguish. He had crammed into his pocket on the doorstep an evening paper containing a vicious reference to James. "What is my uncle doing?" he burst out.

His father smiled shyly. It was the engaging smile of a boy, called on suddenly in class to offer an opinion on the character of some legendary hero, who has prepared nothing but knows that he will be treated with indulgence. "Very difficult to explain," he murmured. "I can tell you what he will do. He'll stifle any real public row that might cast back on himself, and he will work up the private one until all my clubs, which are also his,

ask me to leave. Then he will write to the committees in a passion of indignation and insist on their keeping me under threats of resigning himself. And since he is very well liked by members who write to their committees and I by a few who do not—it will all work out correctly. I shall be asked to stay and have Daniel to thank for it. I shall not have the nerve to refuse to be rescued. Perhaps he will also give me his week's pocket-money and a fountain pen which has begun to leak."

Nat was himself a little shocked by his own comment on this. "I suppose," James observed, "that only the best public school could give you that finish. Don't apologise."

"I won't, sir."

The door opened on Daniel. He shut it and said at once:

"You've come about this ridiculous scandal. I've squashed it already. You needn't think about it again. . . . I'm in for a much worse one myself. . . . I've had a woman. It's been going on since 1917. Coyle-Read's girl; you've met her, Nat. It's out, some friend of hers let it out, and Coyle-Read will do his best to break me over it. Resign or be shown up. He may be bluffing but . . . He's a Yorkshireman, and if I call his bluff he'll probably hand it to me. Damned tyke." For the moment he seemed more concerned by the ungracious shades of the Yorkshire character than by his own position.

"But—can he?" James said.

"She was eighteen when it started. He's saying I—seduced her." Daniel stopped. "You don't seduce that sort of girl," he shouted. "She—good God." He appealed to Nat, who threw him over at once.

"I don't know anything about 'em, sir."

"Take it from me you can't," Daniel said politely. He turned to James. "What are you going to do about it, Infant? I don't want that sort of scandal. I'd rather clear out, and if I clear out now, I'm done. I shouldn't come back."

Nat had never supposed that his father had a familiar name. He was startled by Daniel's use of it, erasing forty years and himself in the turn of a second. In the same second he had a vision of the mature Daniel crawling round a bedroom on his stomach to preserve his haughty elegance. The two together made him want to laugh, and with muttered excuses he fled from the room, only to find, when he had shut the door behind him, that there was nothing to laugh at. Afraid now that his aunt would hear he was in the house and send for him, he left, and walked about St. James's Place until his father came out.

James was going to call on Coyle-Read. It seemed that the old Yorkshireman was under an obligation to James for services rendered in a strange circumstance. It was not an obligation to be lightheartedly talked about, and James had destroyed the written witness. On the way to Coyle-Read's house in Buckingham Gate, he told Nat about it. "But you can't use that, sir," Nat exclaimed.

James stopped short. "Think of something else, then," he said urgently. Father and son looked at each other for a moment (during which a likeness between them queerly came to the surface—Nat was normally a smaller and slighter version of Daniel Grimshaw) and walked on in silence. As they stood on the doorstep of the house Nat thought he had never seen his father look smaller or shabbier. It was impossible to believe that he and Daniel were twins. "We shall be sent round to the back door," he thought. James had the air of a disgraced and dejected puppy.

The Coyle-Reads were dining out. Coyle-Read's sly heavy intelligent face creased into smiles when James came in. "I won't keep you more than ten minutes," James said humbly.

"Keep me an hour," his friend said boisterously, "and I'll bless you. But don't mention your scoundrel of a brother." He seized glasses and a decanter from a table and led the way to his library. Nat was left with Mrs. Coyle-Read, whom he

loathed. "Leery old hag," he thought, and smiled engagingly. An immense vitality and a self-confidence as colossal as it was humourless has assisted Polly Coyle-Read to her reputation. She was indeed a brazen image of herself. She was also her own high priest and one of her chief worshippers. The rest knew their responses, and if some were now failing her, through death or decrepitude, if a generation had at last arisen which was ready to outbid her in her own coin, she was still undefeated and not yet very lonely. She had been a figure in politics so long that she could hardly credit her disappearance—through Daniel's treachery—from a world which she had ruled with the tongue of a shrew. But she had courage and she was already preparing to conquer another world, with her pen this time. Brass, they say in her husband's county, talks. Brass shall write, said she, and wrote the story of her creation, slandering Emily Grimshaw quite by the way.

Her lascivious old eyes scrutinised Emily's son sharply. "Going into politics?" she demanded. Nat shook his head and smiled at her again. "The finest game in the world," said Mrs. Coyle-Read.

"How you must miss it," Nat murmured politely.

He was too young to feel any admiration for the passionate loyalty with which this haggard old woman had fought for her husband's hand, as for her own, during their long partnership, a partnership of fighters.

The long face over against his twitched. "Your uncle," she said, and applied an epithet to Daniel that startled Nat, "first stabbed Coyle-Read in the back and has now blown on my silly bitch of a girl. However, we've got him. He's gone too far this time."

"Oh, you do draw a line?" Nat said in his smooth young voice. He had a feeling that his mother had been even more cruelly hurt than she allowed by that lying anecdote. His out-

rageous impudence delighted him. It was *bonne chance*, and before Mrs. Coyle-Read could deal with him (well she knew how to do it) the door opened on his father, alone. James did not come in. He said, "Are you ready, Nat?" bowed with gentle formality to his old friend's wife, and left at once. Half way down the Mall he stopped.

"I can't see your uncle," he said abruptly. "You must take a message, Nat."

"Did you pull it off, sir?"

"I did. . . . I've lost a friend."

"Shall I tell Daniel that?"

"Tell him it's—over. I've bought him out." James looked humourously at the young man. "It's all wrong, of course. I ought not to have been rescuing Daniel. It was to have been the other way round. I doubt he'll feel it."

Nat had gone a few yards alone, when he heard his father's voice behind him. He hurried back. "I don't think you noticed," James said, "one thing: Daniel never pointed out to us that if he got into trouble he might not be able to save me."

"Are you trying to tell me that Daniel is sometimes almost a gentleman?" Nat said furiously. He moved off again, trembling with rage. But when he had delivered his message and Daniel had thanked him his anger vanished. He suffered from a severe reaction and almost begged Daniel's pardon for being young and shallow. Not quite able to do this, he invited Daniel to lunch with him at his club. Daniel accepted.

"Afraid I can't stand you anything like such a splendid meal as you gave me the other night," Nat said shyly, and took himself off in a hurry. It had just struck him that if he moved quickly he could catch his father before he dined and make sure that for this night at least James did not play bridge. . . .

Daniel went upstairs to Fanny's room. He pushed open the door. The picture of guilt, Fanny stared at him, cheeks crimson

and eyes startled and very blue. The cards with which she had been telling her fortune lay scattered over the bed. She began to shuffle them together, eyeing him with a funny mingling of defiance and mischief.

“Fanny,” said her husband angrily, “you promised me to give up all that rubbish. Have you no conscience—no——” He broke off suddenly, with an air of bewilderment.

“I won’t do it again,” Fanny murmured.

Daniel knelt on the bed and put his arms round her. He held himself against her with his face in her neck. She was very thin in his arms, a ghost of a wife.

“Do you remember——” he said. “Fanny.”

“What shall I remember?”

“What it was like before——” Daniel stopped again and sighed.

“Before what, then?”

“—before you were ill,” Daniel said.

Fanny began to tremble violently.

“Don’t,” Daniel said desperately. “Don’t do that. Fanny.”

“What is it?” Fanny whispered. “Tell me. Is it trouble? You’ve always told me about that. I don’t know why I’m upset. Tell me, and I’ll help you if I can.”

She settled herself in the attitude she always adopted for Daniel’s confidences. As she had listened, intent and frowning, to all the incidents and triumphs and failures of his career, so she listened now to the story of Elizabeth Coyle-Read. Once she laid a finger on one of the scattered cards. “Is she a dark woman?” she asked quietly.

Daniel said nothing.

“Oh,” Fanny whispered, “how old I am.”

Tears ran down Daniel’s face. “I’ve made a fool of myself,” he said loudly. “Oh God. Oh Fanny. Forgive me.”

Fanny took one arm away from him. “Never find my damn

handkerchief," she said fiercely, thrusting a hand under her pillow. She dried Daniel's tears with an edge of the sheet, and held him tightly.

"Never mind, Daniel. Never mind. I can easily stand it. It's just . . . I'm not beautiful any more. I'm not clever any more. . . . I can't remember when I was young."

Daniel did not look at her. "You're the most beautiful woman in the world."

"Were, not are," Fanny corrected him. She flicked the Queen of Spades on to the floor. "Beastly card," she said viciously. "Never liked it." Suddenly she relaxed in his arms. "Comfort me. Comfort me," she cried. "Oh Daniel. Dearest. There, don't think I'm minding about that girl. It's not that at all. . . . You're still here, you always come here, don't you? Count the lines on my face, one for each of the years you've been coming. You've been faithful to my memory. You've been so good to me. Other things don't matter. . . . They do, they do, and I don't care. You needn't comfort me."

"I'm an old fool, Fanny."

"We're both old fools," Fanny said. "Silly old lady, with her tempers and her airs. *Fifty*. Telling herself fortunes, too. At my time of life. . . . My life. . . . What a—a *swiz* it's all been, Daniel. But who cares?"

CHAPTER xvii

ONE morning in September the postman climbed up to Saints Rew with a letter for Emily. He noticed, when he came round the last bend of the drive, a van standing at the main north door, through which two men were carrying a large packing-case. It was the first time anyone from the village had seen this happening, though it had long been known that the house was slowly being gutted. It gave the postman quite a turn. Properly speaking, it turned him aside at the *Duke of Marlborough* to testify to what he had seen, where his story was heard with the mournful relish suitable to tales of death and disgrace.

The solitary letter was from Nat. "He says," Emily murmured, "that he is coming home for the week-end. Oh. . . . Ann is coming too. James, ought Ann to come? Next to Nat and you and Fanny I love Ann more than anyone in the world, but I'm sure Nat shouldn't be thinking of marrying any more people. Of course, the first wasn't a marriage at all, but still they were actually husband and wife . . . *that boy* . . . and I suppose they still are and always will be in the eyes of the Church. He and Ann would really be living a wicked life. . . . It's all damned nonsense to think of that child living in sin. There's no sin in her—except her obstinacy."

The morning after they came, Ann sought James out in his library. She went straight to her point. "I wanted to ask you," she said, "whether you would mind my marrying Nat—later on."

"Very good for Nat," James said absently. He became aware,

a moment or two later, that Ann was still standing at his elbow, with an air of having stood there, nervously determined, for a very long time. "I'm sorry, Ann," he said. "I wasn't really listening. Of course marry Nat if you want to. Are you sure you want him?"

"I don't want anything else."

"You're very young."

"I shall be twenty-one in a few weeks," Ann said in an annoyed voice. "I've arranged everything. I'm not going back to Oxford. I'm going to be the least worthy of Daniel's secretaries. He'll pay me four pounds a week and I shall live by myself in a room over a shop belonging to one of Fanny's friends. It's really a kind of large attic; the rest of the house is the shop, and there's a basement with a bath, and an old woman. I shall give Nat a key and he can come when he wants my company. It will be more convenient for him than Fanny's house and less tiring than walking about London."

James smiled at her. "You're a very competent young woman, Ann."

"I'm not repellent, I hope," Ann said anxiously. "But something had to be done." She added hurriedly: "You see, I want to marry Nat more than he wants me. He wouldn't have thought of it if I hadn't kept bringing myself under his eye. He was lost and not happy when I started. You can see that he's much happier now, can't you?" She blushed hotly. "I made love to Nat, Uncle James."

James was startled by the blush and by Ann's two long speeches. He had never heard her say so much before, and he was moved by the confidence. "If I had a daughter," he said cheerfully, "I should like her to be very like you, Ann. I am glad to know that you are prepared to be my daughter-in-law."

Ann smiled delicately. "There's worse to come," she said doubtfully.

"Why have you come to me? Your aunt would be much more use to you."

Ann hesitated, "Emily has so much *loyalty*," she said at last. "If she feels that it had to happen for Nat's good, she won't mind. But I wanted to know what you thought."

"I think you're too much of a child to be married, or to marry a young man who is not——" James paused thoughtfully. It had just occurred to him that Ann had never been considered too young to look after herself. He wondered whether she were as confident as her air. A troubling feeling of pity visited him.

"—not in love with me, you mean," Ann said placidly. "But Nat is—as much as he will let himself be. Denny's leaving him was an awful shock. He hasn't really got over it." She gave James a direct glance. "Nat is not much interested in women, or in other people at all, for themselves, only for what they can give him to interest him. I daresay he'll never want anyone except me very much."

James was still troubled. Ann's knowledge of human nature troubled him now. Only an acute and sensitive mind could have picked up so much wisdom at Ann's age. He was struck with fresh pity at the sight of this frail sensitive young creature abandoning herself without a tremor to the most reckless of adventures. Or did her coming to him show that she was secretly afraid?

"I can't help you," he said abruptly. He frowned. What could he say to her? "A man, even a young man, can love a woman with his imagination, his heart, and his carnal self. The last is of no importance in itself. The second is the impulse that makes homes, and kindness between men and women; but the first makes dreams, ecstasy, misery and romance. Find all three together and you have the rarest thing in the world, the marriage of true lovers."

Ann looked at him quickly and said: "You mean—do you mean that Nat does not feel all that for me, Uncle James?"

"Do you think he does, Ann?" Ann's hands, resting on the edge of his desk, gave her away; he hardened himself against them.

Ann said steadily: "I know he doesn't. . . . I don't think Nat's carnal self is much interested in me, Uncle James. And it was Denny he loved with his imagination. . . . It doesn't matter. He has no one else and he does need me. He says so and Nat doesn't tell lies. He wouldn't bother. You don't think I'm being unfair to Nat?"

"I think perhaps you're unfair to both of you. Nat's very young too, Ann."

Ann sighed. "I can't help it, my dear. We shall both have to risk it. I couldn't let Nat down now." She hesitated, with an air that made James think of a very young cat walking delicately past a possible enemy. "I've thought lately that it's rather foolish to wait months for Denny to finish her case. If Emily is right, then Nat is married to her for good and I can never be really his wife. So that there is no point in waiting until Nat can pretend to marry me. . . . In fact, waiting becomes almost indecent."

"Ann," James said firmly, "you don't in the least believe that Nat is married to his present wife for ever and that he can't take a second wife."

Ann chuckled. "No, I don't," she admitted. "But I shouldn't think of asking Nat to wait until we'd been made formally respectable, if he wants to live with me before then."

"Does he?"

"Not yet," Ann said.

James got up sharply. "Ann, if your misguided passion for looking after my son ends in your leading him into proposing some such madness, I won't countenance you."

"I won't lead him," Ann said calmly. "But this divorce is long a-doing and Nat is getting more used to me all the time. Very soon he won't want to live away from me. And then. . . . In your heart of hearts, Uncle James, do you know any good reason why Nat and I should not be living together at this moment?"

James delayed answering. The moment of silence was gradually filled by a number of thin remote sounds, the warm blurred hum of bees in the rose trees, the sharp whisper of a scythe, little spurts and jets of chattering sound from the birds on the lawn. In the clear hot air sounds rose and fell like the separate drops of a fountain. Nat's voice, singing:

*"King Pandion he is dead,
All thy friends are lapp'd in lead,"*

suddenly drowned all the rest. James glanced at Ann. She was smiling, with a soft radiance that hurt and startled him.

"Heaven forbid that I should confuse any issue for you," he said in despair. "You know what you are able to do. Nat is in your hands. You'll be kind to him."

It was not until she had kissed him lightly and gone away that he remembered he had meant, when he began his answer, to tell the child to be kind to herself. He did not know what he ought to do. In the end he did nothing, but sat on at his desk thinking painfully about the war, Saints Rew, and Nat's first marriage—for a moment when he got to this he grudged the boy's body to Denny Sadgrove as bitterly as if he had not known the unimportance of the carnal self. He saw Nat cross the lawn with Ann skipping beside him. Then he went to look for his Emily.

Nat and Ann were crossing the lawn in search of shade. They dawdled through the orchards, where Ann picked up and ate three wind-fallen apples, and through the kitchen garden and so

out into the chalky cart-track to the downs, where there was less shade than ever. It was white and hot. The hedges were covered with a film of pale dust. Up this Nat hurried, with Ann lagging behind. He never noticed that she had stopped until he turned round to reproach her for loitering and discovered her seated, very white, at the side of the path. She gasped when she tried to speak to him.

“It’s so hot, Nat.”

“I’m sorry,” Nat said. “We’ll go back.”

“No, we’ll go on. I shall be better in a minute.” And she was better. Colour came back to her lips and with Nat helping she climbed the rest of the steep narrow road to the downs. There they sat under the fringe of trees and looked across the valley.

“Are you all right now, Ann?”

“Yes,” Ann said apologetically. “I’m very sorry. I was all right until you hurried.” Nat said nothing and she felt estranged from him and ashamed. When he began to talk she realised with a sigh of relief that he had not been thinking about her at all, and she listened drowsily, her mind still confused and light. Nat’s profile, the arched line of his nose, and the fine downy hairs on his cheekbones, got between her and what he was saying. “If you would only not talk,” she thought. “You are beautiful, my little love.”

He was drawing a contrast for her between this and all other corners of England. Other downs were not in the least like these. The Berkshire downs above Lambourn were England of the purest English; their delicate bounding lines, their lovely openness and barenness, their roads along which race-horses stepped mincingly, their limpid neutral colours, claiming nothing, were England to their heart. Northumberland below the Wall was savage and blood-soaked; its roads were as relentless as wounds, it was grimmer and less peaceful, and full of ghosts. Such ghosts as belong to southern fells and downs lie quietly asleep in their

green clothes. In the border country they crack harsh jests behind every stone hedge. Cornwall was not England at all, as was well known when "Sir Tristram went out of Cornwall into England." It was a land which has never learned the English secret, to be nothing too much. Its moors were bleaker, its lanes heavier in Spring with may, its skies bluer, its fields greener than in England they would be. It was proper to allow it beauty, and allowed to deny it an English birthright. Yorkshire was, of all English counties, that one which most obstinately keeps its secrets and wears its English rue with a difference. It savours of itself; harsh, soft, arrogant, tender, teeming, empty, it keeps no memories but its own.

But the downs about Saints Rew remember the Roman legionaries and the Middle Ages. Ann's mind hung dizzily for a moment between the Romans who loved beech trees—there were beeches behind her down both sides of a green road—and the generations of pilgrims, pedlars, and merchants, who crossing these downs to the Plain had come, in the space between one breath and the next, on the spire of Salisbury, a great sword stuck hilt down in the earth, an upward stab of agonised ecstasy, drawn up into the air like a great middle note drawn with exquisite and shattering accuracy from a violin, and lost a breath for all eternity. She lost a breath herself in thinking of them; the wind moving stealthily through the long grass blew in mediæval England and the piled white clouds above the Plain were incontrovertible witnesses against change. The moment vanished, leaving her staring at a corner of Nat's face; he lay face downwards on the warm turf and all she could see of it was a slender cheekbone and curved lashes, golden in the sun. A pang shocked her into clasping both arms round her thin ribs. What was this emotion that made it difficult for her even to talk to Nat? Endearments and caresses did not lift the frightful burden from her heart. No word could be less adequate than

love to describe it. It was always incommunicable, a sense of him that nothing obscured. She smiled at a thought that if Nat were to turn on her with dislike she would die, so close to his and defenceless before him her spirit was.

Nat rolled on to his back and spoke to her. "You were going to tell me something, Ann."

She told him at once that he startled her by a shout of horrified mirth. "You can't live over a shop called The Camel's Eye, my dear child. It's not decent. You know what Fanny's friends, bless her, are. All charlatans like Polly Coyle-Read (I believe Fanny is the only woman the old hag respects) and snobs like Frances Polchester."

"It is Frances Polchester's shop. You needn't come there unless you want to," Ann observed.

Nat glanced at her. "Of course I shall come," he said soberly. He sat up. "Are you happy here, Ann?"

Ann nodded. "Every time I look at a tree," she said dreamily, "I cannot bear the thought of dying and being buried *under* the earth."

"Dear Ann."

"How comforting your smiles are. I daresay, if I'm dying ever, and you smile at me, I shall revive at once."

Her tone, even more than the exaggerated little speech, fairly shook Nat. It knocked the pride out of him, too, and the face he turned to her was that of a humbled boy, so kind and dear and engaging that Ann looked at it with a familiar helpless anguish.

"Is that what you think of me, then, Ann?"

What was it James had said? That Nat was in her hands? She must go very carefully and fairly and honourably. An impulse made her look down at him with a smile of mischief.

"I think you're as beautiful as you are conceited," she said

calmly. "But you're very shabby. I believe I shall give you three shirts for your Christmas present."

"I need some pyjamas more," Nat said dreamily. "Especially if I'm going to be married again." He made himself comfortable against her shoulder. "When shall you be marrying me, Ann?"

"When you like."

"Soon." He was silent so long that Ann thought he had gone to sleep. He spoke suddenly. "Shall you want children, Ann?"

Ann tried to see his face. "I think so. . . . You must have been an adorable little boy, Nat. Should you mind?"

"I should be sure to like your children, Ann. I don't want you to be hurt, though. And I couldn't bear to lose you."

Ann laughed at him a little. "I shouldn't think of leaving you, darling Nat."

Nat looked at her in sudden grief, realising for the first time her youth and utter dependence on him. "I won't fail you," he stammered. "I promise. I'll take care of you." He hid his face against her, not sure now whether he were protecting her against time or death. In fact, he hardly seemed to be protecting her at all. He felt much more as if it were the other way round.

CHAPTER xviii

THE case of young Nathaniel Grimshaw *v* his wife came before the court in November. The guilty young man spent the day out of town. He went to Oxford, where he skulked about his own college, reading down the new Roll of Honour, with his hat in his hand, so that he looked like any other of the bare-headed undergraduates brushing past him, nothing to suggest that between him and them lay a no-man's-land of stripped trees, torn earth, and roads of which he knew every scar better than he knew the undisturbed grey flags under his feet. He had had an idea that by coming here he would put Oxford between himself and Denny, but Oxford let him down. She filled him with grief for something he had lost without knowing it, for Springs he had not seen break, for fields that had flowered without him, for all the exquisite soft coming and going of the years that had folded down, minute on delicate minute, like leaves falling, on Athens, on august Rome, on the Paris of Abelard and Heloise, on Oxford herself, when he had left her. He drew an invisible line under the names of the men he had known; he forgot their faces and remembered odd things about them, how one had taken an involuntary header into the river, and another stammered. These were his real memories of them, a widening ripple in sunlit water and a young excited voice. These existed only in his brain, and when that was quieted they would die again who were already dead and turned to Flanders clay. A clear stuttering voice from the quad startled him out of his skin, it was so like the other. Every lovely careless thing was immortal, the

first crocus, the small rain on budding trees, young voices, and running streams. He fancied that if he went to a place he knew of he would meet his younger self sitting with arms crossed on his knees in the bows of a boat, dreaming, in an old May, with eyes reflecting the clear water, scattered white petals, and a wet spray of hawthorn swinging out from the bank.

He went back to town and bought the evening papers, through which he searched distastefully for his name. He found nothing in three papers and a brief paragraph in the fourth. The one fact that would have lifted his out of the ruck of dull undefended cases had somehow been missed, and no one had realised that he was the son of an ex-Minister and nephew to Daniel Grimshaw. He could have shouted with relief. He remembered Ann and rang her up and told her.

Ann had hardly expected to hear his voice that day. She knew far too well for her comfort how Nat would suffer under the squalid vulgarity of divorce. He had a fastidious horror of public intimacies. She knew too, that he would turn from her and not to her, if it fell out as badly as it might. In her own relief she blundered into asking him if he were coming to see her. There was a brief silence. Then Nat said deliberately: "No. I think not. Good-night, Ann." He loved Ann, and he did not love Denny, and for the life of him he could not help resenting it on her tonight when nothing remained of his marriage but three lines in an evening paper. He went back to Queen Street, to the bedroom where he had once fallen asleep thinking of Denny. What he thought this night before he slept was bitter enough, and he woke suddenly to find Mrs. Clemens bending over him.

He started up in bed. "What is it?" he said. "Some one screamed."

"You did," said Mrs. Clemens.

"I'm very sorry." Nat was vaguely bewildered. "I ought not to scream in your nice room. I'm sure your son didn't, when he

was here." To his surprise, he saw that Mrs. Clemens was crying. Tears rolled down her brown withered cheeks and dropped on him. But she went away and he fell asleep again. In the morning he had forgotten all about it.

This was in November. One evening in March Denny telephoned to him at South Kensington and asked him to come and see her at the flat. Nat did not want to go, and tried to put her off.

"I ought not to meet you at all, you know. Didn't your lawyers warn you against that? If the Court suspects collusion you won't get your divorce after all, my dear."

"I must see you," Denny repeated. "Be here at nine. I can't give you dinner, but you won't mind that when you hear what I have to say."

Now what did the woman mean by that? He gave it up. Probably nothing. "Very well."

He knew that Ann was expecting him, and he rang her up and told her that Denny wanted him. Her answer came at once: "All right, my lamb. I don't mind."

"But I do. And Ann——"

"Yes?"

"I'll ring you up afterwards," he said hurriedly, "and tell you what has happened. But go to bed. It may be late."

"That won't matter. I'll leave my door open, and the telephone will wake me. Bless you, Nat."

He discovered, on his way up the stairs, that he still had a key to the flat; he let himself in, and surprised his wife leaning out of the window. She swung round, dropping the blind.

"I was watching for you," she said simply. "I wanted you."

Her voice touched him queerly. "What did you want, my dear?"

Denny seated herself on the couch and looked up at her young husband. "Sit beside me, Nat."

He smiled at her affectionately. "I'll stay here, where I can look at you."

"Am I—pretty?"

"Very."

Queer to realise that the pouted mocking smile he had thought adorable did not move him now at all. He felt sorry it did not. I must be a very sentimental young man, he thought ironically. He watched Denny curve her arms in a familiar gesture, smooth her lovely hair. She looked at him out of the corners of her eyes.

"George has left me, Nat."

Nat felt himself turn cold. "I don't understand."

"Try to," his wife said drily. "George is not going to marry me." Suddenly her self-control broke and she began to talk about the Duchess in a way that startled Nat, loosing on him a flood of vituperative speech. It became unbearable.

"Don't Denny," Nat said.

"Why not? The man is a cad."

"Did you tell him so?"

"When I felt that things were going wrong I did," Denny said hoarsely. "He made no plans for our future. I talked to him about it again and again."

"I warned you against trying to hurry George," Nat muttered. "The Savills are every one alike."

"Is that all you have to say about it?" Denny exclaimed.

"What do you want me to say, my dear?"

Denny stood up. "Don't you want me back then?"

This was what Nat had been expecting, but he had no answer ready. His wife, eagerly watching his face, saw it with every mark of youth wiped out. He looked old and tired to death. His shoulders had a defeated air. He shook his head.

Denny looked frightened. "I'm still your wife—until the second decree. You must want me."

"I don't," Nat said briefly.

“Why not?”

“I’m in love with Ann.”

Denny stared at him. Her face puckered up and she began to cry. She cried as Nat had never seen her cry, in an utter abandon, not caring how she looked, showing him her flushed swollen face shamelessly. Her tears hurt him intolerably. He was shocked and distressed beyond measure. He caught her in his arms and held her there as if he never meant to let her go. She was trying to say something.

“Oh what have I done?” Nat cried. “What have I done? My dear. *My dear.*”

“I’m thirty,” Denny stammered. “You can’t leave me. It’s too late for me to start again.” She put a hand up to his cheek. “You’re crying too. Are you sorry for me? Let me go, Nat.”

Nat held her closer. “I can’t let you go,” he muttered.

He felt every sinew strained and tortured, as if he were being broken. He braced his knees against a chair.

“You love me better, then?”

Nat groaned. “I’ve always loved you better. No one will ever take your place, Denny.”

He heard Denny sigh. “Then that’s all right,” she murmured. “We’ll soon get rid of Ann. Have you promised her anything?”

Nat let her go suddenly and leaned against the wall. Everything he had said was true and a lie. He would never feel for Ann the passionate adoration, the longing to give and protect and worship, that he had felt for his wife. But it was Ann he was going to marry—if he married again at all. At the moment he wanted neither of them. He looked at his wife’s disfigured face and knew, loathing himself for it, that he was going to fail her, after all. I couldn’t let Ann down now, he thought, remembering, with longing, her funny protective tenderness. He did not pity Denny, he was raw with pity for her. But I can’t go back to *that*, he thought desperately. In a moment of dreadful

clarity he saw what his life with Denny would be like. She would take and take, all he could give her. She would let him make love to her, until a more attractive lover offered. She would trade on his pity, would give him in return nothing. It was what she had always done, and what his marriage had been; the glamour over it was gone, that was all. . . . His thoughts took a fresh turn. What had glamour to do with it? Why should he expect it or look for it? Marriage was not glamour. But marriage—for him—was not now Denny. He knew what he wanted, and Denny could not give it to him.

Why expect to be given anything? . . . If it had ever been laid on him to look after Denny, the obligation remained. An honourable man looked after his wife, however badly she behaved herself. Nothing altered that. . . . But how far did that go? Did it push him to living with her? Suppose he said to Denny: "I don't think I could live with you again but I'll look after you all my life. You shall have all the money I can get for you." Would that do?

He came out of his perplexities to find Denny studying him furtively. In her watchful glance there was more than a hint of triumph. It seemed to him more pitiful than her tears had been.

"It's late. I must go," he said abruptly.

"We are married, Nat."

"Not *married* . . ." Nat said. "Forgive me. I'd give anything for this not to have happened."

"But you want me," Denny cried. She regarded him with a puzzled frown. When he did not answer she held out her arms. He did not move to them and she came across the room and leaned her body against him. "Think, Nat," she whispered. She took his arms and folded them round herself. "You can stay now. I'll allow you. We'll be happy again."

"Oh God," Nat said loudly, "I don't want that." He freed himself and stood staring at her. "I can't tell you what I want.

I'm no use to you. Take it that I'm finished. . . . I must go. I can't stand any more of this—scene, Denny. . . . Don't cry, my poor dear. For pity's sake, don't cry any more." He kissed her despairingly, holding her with a dreadful gentleness. From the very door, he came back to kiss her again. He fled at last, in anguish. Denny cried uncontrollably and called him. Once she thought she heard his returning footsteps and ran to the glass. But the door of the flat across the landing opened and shut, and she gave him up then. She was almost sure now that he would be back in a day or two. After a long time, during which she was busy making good the ravages of self-pity, she looked at her watch. It was nearly two o'clock. . . .

Nat walked back to his rooms. He remembered that he had said he would speak to Ann on the telephone. She might be awake waiting for him. But he was too sore to talk to Ann. He was exhausted and fell asleep involuntarily, half-undressed.

In the morning he woke late and went off to work. He worked through the day, without stopping to eat, and kept his mind off Denny and her tears and what he was going to do about her. He did not want to see Ann, and it never occurred to him that his silence—when she knew where he had been—might hurt and puzzle her. About five o'clock the impulse to run away got the better of him. He decided to go to Saints Rew, and caught the last train. It landed him at Stockbridge at nine. He set off to walk the six miles to the house, carrying his suitcase. The night was windless and starless. Long before he reached the top of the hill on the side of the valley opposite Saints Rew he was sweating in the cold air. He put the suitcase down to light a cigarette and discovered that his hands were shaking. This annoyed him very much. He pushed them in his pockets and leaned against a low wall.

The blackness above him was filled with a sudden clamour, and a flight of wild geese passed over his head and dropped

down into the valley. He saw them descending, with arched wings, etched against the grey opacity of the hillside.

The sight lifted him clean out of his troubled spirits. He caught his breath at the naked terrifying beauty of the strong bent wings. When they had gone, he thought he had never stood in so empty a place. The cloud over his mind lifted and he began to think clearly about Denny for the first time since her tears confused him. It might be wrong to leave her to look after herself in a world that was plainly too much for her. Since he had married her, he was probably responsible for her while she refused to be responsible for herself. Very well then: he would not humbug himself. He was failing her. But he knew now that he could never live with her again. He was not the boy who had married Denny Sadgrove, adoring her with a boy's shy pure passion. He had neither the control nor the kindness to make a success of it . . . now that he knew her. He saw himself shut up with Denny in the intimacy of the flat, and the thought made him shudder. The memory of those months between his demobilisation and George Savill's return from Paris, and the humiliations Denny put on him then, were too bitter and present. He never forgot them entirely. "I couldn't stand it," he said aloud. "I hope I never see her again."

The thought of Ann took him by surprise. It cleared out everything else; he had only one impulse left, to get to Ann at once. In the glow of his cigarette he made out the time to be ten o'clock. The night express stopped for a moment at Andover just after one. That was eleven miles from where he stood. He thought he could do it, if he walked quickly. Picking up his suitcase, he turned back to the Andover road. Twelve o'clock found him with five miles still to go; he was sobbing a little as he walked and his feet kept stumbling on the narrow road.

CHAPTER xix

NAT never thought that Ann might have her own periods of diffidence and trembling, during which the young girl wondered whether, after all, she could pull off the marriage. These visited her oftenest in those half-waking hours of the night, when courage is at its lowest. Then she lay in bed, her little body shaking, and thought of her war-shocked, moody, difficult lover, and told herself that she must hold on to him with all her strength, and that she could not, she was not clever enough to do it, he did not love her enough. She must, she could not—she swung from one to the other, and Nat's haggard young face, smiling his engaging smile, floated up to her from the darkness at the foot of her bed, to torment her with doubts and longing. In the morning, she was the serene loving Ann to whom Nat came confidently, bringing her his worst moods, clinging to her one day, eluding and distracting her the next. She never let him down and she never lost her nerve—in his sight or hearing.

On the evening Nat went to see his wife, Ann went through one of her bad hours. She was still awake, and searching among the rout of her courage, when the telephone bell rang on the landing below. She slid out of bed; as she flew down the stairs she noticed that the time was nearly two o'clock. It was Denny's voice on the telephone . . . "Is that you, Ann? I thought you'd be interested to know that Nat is here with me."

"I beg your pardon," Ann murmured.

"He is staying. He told me about you, but he didn't know,

when you were pursuing him, that I was ready to take him back. I'm sure you won't be troublesome."

Ann hung up the receiver and went back to her room. She stood beside her bed, pulling at the quilt. "I did pursue you, didn't I, Nat?" she said softly. "Did you tell her that?" It came upon her with a shock that she had lost Nat now; she sighed, and fainted across her pillow. It was only for a moment, but when she came back she felt very lonely and got into bed with tears running down her cheeks. They were for Nat. "Denny won't be kind to him," she thought despairingly. "Oh Nat. Darling darling, Nat." After a while she began to suffer as only the very young suffer, whom life has not blunted or wearied. She lay on her face, not making a sound, or moving, until she heard the old woman shuffling up from the basement to call her. When the door opened she pretended to be asleep, ashamed to show herself to that incurious old gaze.

The old woman heard her singing in her bath and making the curious sound that represented Ann's attempts to whistle. She usually practised it in her bath, but got no better at it. She went off to work, still whistling conscientiously, like a wheezy little organ pipe. There were to be no more tears. Even when she came home late in the evening and remembered, looking round the shabby little room to which she had uselessly condemned herself, that there would be no more Nat, she only thought ridiculously that the uncomfortable chair he always sat in would miss his affectionate abuse. "Creak no more," she said to it kindly, and pushed it into a dark corner. Then she opened a cupboard door and seeing something there that sent a funny little spasm of emotion across her face, she shut the door with a jerk and went thoughtfully to bed. She never heard Nat open the door and come in, but when he had been looking at her for a moment or two an instinct woke her. She sat up. In the light of the candle she had left burning she saw that Nat looked pale

and worried. It struck her at once that he had come to explain that everything was over for her. Her heart quickened with pity and grief.

"It's all right, loveliest," she said quickly. "I never expected you'd stay with me . . ."

Nat sat down abruptly on the edge of the bed. "Oh Ann," he said. He went straight to her arms as if he had a right to be there, and Ann held him carefully. "I couldn't stay with her. I've come back. Ann. *Ann*."

Ann trembled. She made a great effort to keep herself quiet for Nat's sake. "Are you sure you want me?" I must ask, she said to herself, even if he can't tell me.

"Never let me go again, Ann."

"I love you," Ann said loudly. "I don't care what you've been doing. I love you."

"I only just got that train," Nat said. He held Ann closer. He felt as if he would never have the energy to move again. His body ached. "Comfort me," he said inaudibly.

"I *am* comforting you," Ann whispered. "I'm comforting you with my very bones. Is it very late?"

Nat sat up with an effort. "I suppose so . . . I ought to go." He looked ruefully at Ann. She stroked his face; he took the hand and kissed it absently. "Why shouldn't I stay?" he said. "Shall I stay, Ann?"

"Would you like to?"

"I'm hot and dusty. Not fit to come into your bed."

"You can't be hot," Ann murmured. "Not in March."

"I am hot," Nat said testily. "Hot—and revoltingly dirty. I ran."

"It would be difficult for you to have a bath here," Ann said doubtfully. She looked at him. "You needn't have a bath," she said quickly. "I don't care. You look so tired. My little child, my dear."

"Do you mind?" Nat murmured. He took off all his clothes and got into the bed. Ann felt very cold to him. He lay down and took her in his arms. He felt her thin immature body trembling. With a sigh, he pressed himself into its soothing coolness and fell instantly asleep.

Ann lay awake for what seemed a long time, reluctant to lose in sleep the delicious sense of triumph and bliss that had filled her from the moment she took Nat's exhausted young body to her own. She slept unawares. It grew faintly light in the room, and Nat stirred. The slight movement woke Ann. She got up then, and dressed, moving about the room like a little flicker of light. When it was nearly seven o'clock she bent over Nat and woke him with an anguished reluctance.

"You must wake up, my heart," she said sorrowfully. "I don't want you to, but you must." While Nat dressed she made him a cup of tea. "I'm afraid it's not much for you on a winter's morning," she remarked anxiously. "But the old thing sleeps on my bread and butter. Your mother says she keeps it under her bed. I suppose in the army you would have had rum in it on a morning like this. I have nothing like that." She frowned. "I have some orange curacao, if that's any good."

"What on earth are you doing with curacao?" Nat said teasingly. "Do you drink it?"

Ann blushed. "You said you liked it. I bought a bottle the day before yesterday; I thought you could drink it in the evenings. Will you have some?"

"No." Nat smiled at her.

"I was afraid you wouldn't." Ann sighed. "It's not a morning drink, is it? Dear Nat, you must hurry. I can hear that old woman moving about in the hall now."

"Then she's found my suitcase," Nat said grimly. "I left it there last night."

They stared at each other in dismay. Ann chuckled. "You

might just as well go on living with me," she observed. "Tell your father I didn't plan it . . . it happened, but I'm not sorry. Nothing that has you in it will ever make me unhappy. I don't mind anything now that you've come back." She stopped hurriedly, afraid that she might begin to ask Nat questions he did not want to answer.

Nat looked at her in a sudden passion of admiration. "There's no one like you. No one in the world. Bless you. I'll do anything to please you, Ann. I'll even drink your curacao. Shall I open it now?"

It was already open, as if Ann had expected him to be in such a hurry to get at it that he could not wait to draw the cork. Nat emptied the dregs of his tea out of the window and poured a mouthful into the cup. He swallowed it with every mark of pleasure, and adjured her not to buy any more. Then he kissed her, called her his little love, and crept down the stairs. Ann heard his footsteps hesitate in the hall. The front door shut with a devastating crash.

Ann paused beside her bed and laid her cheek on the pillow. "Let me keep him," she said. "Let me keep him. I'll be very careful of him. I'll take care of him all my life." She was dreadfully afraid, but her fear was worth more to her than happiness. Nat had gone off looking rested and young. "I did that for him," she thought confidently, and then turned pale with the terror of losing him after all. She would never feel sure of her power to keep Nat, never be sure of him. She would never be secure. She smiled, a doubtful exquisite smile, such a one as she had smiled to herself in the darkness with Nat asleep beside her. Security was nothing to her and Nat everything.

When the old woman came in, more like a ruffled haystack than a woman, Ann was busy at the table in the window. From behind the long fine hair she had brushed over her face came a

more than usually vigorous sibilance. The old woman was not deceived. There had been goings-on, and she knew it. "There's your breakfast," she said grimly, "if you have the heart to eat."

Ann only laughed.

CHAPTER xx

NAT came to more than one decision as he sat beside his suitcase in the Green Park, waiting until he could decently present himself for breakfast at his club. The morning sky was very blue, and the small branches on the tree nearest him were a delicate clear red. Across the Park a bugle called, a sweet shattering note that flew into the air as cleanly as a bird, the most heady music, except the trumpets, that man has devised for his own maddening. Nat smiled involuntarily. It made him think of rimed grass and a frosty road, and the ringing noise of marching feet, a voice in the rear ranks that he recognised for that scoundrel Carr's, silenced at Hamel, and Perry Smith on a horse, smiling like a fool because he was happy.

Well, that was all over, had been for more than two years, during which time he had played the fool fairly thoroughly. And that was over too. As he saw it now, he was free to give up anything of his own for the sake of his unprofitable work, but not free to condemn to a harassed life a person dependent on him, as Denny depended. Not to speak of Ann, who would allow him to drag her through any kind of poverty and difficult living, if he said they must live like that.

He heard a clock strike nine, and getting up, walked across the road to his club. He sat down to breakfast with old Foulkes, who was staying there. Old Foulkes surveyed the club kipper on his plate with fastidious doubt, and made a precise observation on its origin and age.

"I've just ordered two," Nat pointed out. "I thought I couldn't do better than follow your lead, sir."

Old Foulkes looked pleased. "I've led you astray. Who would have supposed I had so much influence on your generation?"

The waiter arrived bearing two kippers, and set them down before Nat with the old-world benevolence he affected on these occasions. "I think they're gaseous," Nat said cheerfully. "They're the worst thing that has happened to me since the war. What is the worst thing that ever happened to you, sir?"

"Being ten minutes late for dinner at Marlborough House in 1896," old Foulkes said thoughtfully. "I think one of the best was seeing an eminent critic and an even more eminent scientist murderously pursuing each other round this very room on hands and knees. They were both exceedingly drunk: the critic got his teeth into the other man's calf and worried it . . . A thing like that couldn't happen today. The young members have no convictions—and no conversation."

Nat smiled at him with respectful affection. Old Foulkes's clear eyes, his careful out-moded elegance, his serenity—which nothing disturbed—were lovable and pathetic. He was the faithful witness of a time and an England so infinitely remote that it had already the wistful charm of dreams. The dream was robust—a vision of splendid solid houses, beautiful women, some graciously virtuous and some magnificently not, hansom-cabs, a whiskered Prince of Wales, Peace and Plenty (at least where it showed)—but old Foulkes was not robust. He had an air of fragility that went to Nat's heart. He felt at once much older and coarser than old Foulkes. "My generation disappoints you sir."

Foulkes said in his polite old voice: "Not at all. But it surprises me. In my day a young man chose a profession and worked at it. He was an army man, a civil servant, an attaché or a stockbroker. Nowadays the young men are all trying to ex-

press themselves, as they so strangely put it. They live in horrible cottages—cottages, my dear boy. Dreadful places *in the country*—and write books or compose theories. They wear clothes of an unbelievably debased kind and employ their wives as cooks. It shocks me. I was poor myself once, in my Cambridge days. I shared a room in Jermyn Street during vacations, with a pre-Raphaelite painter. The duns used to wait in the passage for us. But I did not suppose for a moment that I could live like that. I gave it up when I left Cambridge and I went to work . . . Those were good days. But a holiday, my dear Nat, a youthful indiscretion, not a *life*."

"And the pre-Raphaelite, sir?"

"Died young," old Foulkes said gently. His manner suggested that the act was a natural tribute to Victorian ideals.

Nat withdrew to the drawing-room, where, in the disapproving company of two of the servants, he wrote to Denny. He was in their way. The uneasy atmosphere of a half-cleaned room distracted him. When he had finished his letter he wanted to write it over again but he was ashamed to stay there any longer, holding up the world's work with his emotions, and stalking out with it thrust the wretched thing into the post. He had written: "My dear Denny. I am sorry to have hurt you. I'm afraid I can't come back. We could never pull it off again. You needn't worry about your future. I'll arrange for you to have more money—enough for you to be comfortable, I hope. Forgive me for letting you down like this. I shouldn't have been any use to you. Yours, Nat."

What would old Foulkes have thought of that, he wondered. Very little.

He went directly to see Daniel Grimshaw, and presented himself in Daniel's study with a mixed air of defiance and appeal.

"That job you offered me, sir."

"Is still waiting."

"I'll come."

His uncle displayed a startling magnanimity. "I'll make you a present of ten thousand pounds, Nat."

"In place of the job?"

"Of course."

"Thank you very much, sir. But I'd rather try to earn it."

Daniel sighed. "Very well," he said. "Go down to the works tomorrow, will you? I'll see that Rufford expects you. But mind, Nat, no fooling about with science. You've come in to make profits and to give orders to the six tame mice I keep in that laboratory of ours. You're twenty-six. A boy. Allow four years for the war, you're twenty-two. I was in the firm myself at twenty-two. I'll give you seven hundred and fifty a year and make you a director in 1924. All right?"

"You're damned generous, sir."

"Well, don't dislike me for it." How thin and fine-drawn the boy's face was. His mouth was too close pressed and his eyes had a fatigued brightness. Daniel felt a queer light sensation in his chest. Getting old, getting soft.

Nat smiled. "One snag, sir."

Daniel gave him a sharp glance. Never know what bees James's son might be cherishing in his bonnet. "Yes?"

"Ann. I intend to run away with Ann, uncle Daniel."

"You're getting a divorce, boy. Can't you wait for it?"

"That may not come off. My wife's plans——"

"You had a successor who has backed down?" Daniel said shrewdly. "I thought as much. Well, what about it?"

"My wife," Nat said with an effort, "has asked me to come back to her. I can't manage that. She may resent it." He felt that he was exposing Denny to a merciless critic. But all his uncle said was:

"And Ann?"

"Is willing to take me on chance."

"Ann's a fool," Daniel said carefully. "Any girl is a fool who puts herself in that position. Twenty years ago it would have finished her. I daresay you've given very little thought to that side of it. It's a loose age. You'll probably find friends."

"I hope not, sir," Nat exclaimed.

"Don't like the idea of loose-living friends?" his uncle said grimly. "Well, Ann will lose her job. You can keep yours. She's not my niece and she's of age. I suppose your aunt is already in her confidence. You can bring her to dinner when no one else is expected."

"I'll be damned if I do," Nat said quietly.

Daniel's face twitched. "Do as you please," he said. "I'm behaving decently according to my lights. They're not yours . . . Your aunt would like to see you before you go."

Fanny's woman was finishing her hair when Nat came in. "Darling!" Fanny cried. "At last! You can go now, my good Lily. And try to think of some more suitable way of spending your evenings. What do you think, Nat, this preposterous woman has been keeping company, as they say, with a man for fifteen years and he hasn't had the decency to ask her to marry him. Sheer waste of her evenings, I call it."

"Sheer blindness," Nat said cheerfully. Lily had been his good friend from the remote days when she conveyed Fanny's sovereigns to his hand under Daniel's very nose. How he had hated his uncle in those days. I must be growing old, he thought; or Daniel is maturing.

Lily went, and Fanny glanced at him sideways.

"You've been keeping away, Nat . . . Did you know about Daniel and that girl?"

"Yes," Nat said pitifully.

Fanny looked over his head. "Well, he told me about it, anyway." She said nothing for some moments. Then she spoke

softly. "Poor Daniel. Do you think she was a comfort to him, Nat?"

"No, I don't," Nat said.

"Do you suppose he'll do it again? Honestly, Nat. No pretty speeches."

Nat hesitated. He cursed himself for not having seen this coming; his aunt had been too quick for him. "I don't know, aunt Fanny," he said at last. "Probably not."

"Oh well," Fanny said . . . She pressed her lips together. "Don't you ever do anything like that, Nat. Promise me."

Nat promised.

"I don't think you would," his aunt said meditatively. "You look like Daniel, but you're actually more like James, who never looked at any woman but Emily, and only at her with half an eye. You've changed a lot. You'll lead your next wife an awful life, but I daresay she won't care, if you stick to her . . . Do you remember going with us, and James and Emily, to Windsor? You were a very little boy. With a ravishing smile. For once Emily had a new hat. Daniel looked very handsome that day and I was—it was before I fell ill. Do you remember what I was like then, Nat?" . . .

Denny's reply to that wretched letter was dreadful and unrestrained. She abused Ann violently and concluded five pages of it by saying: "You were here in my flat until two o'clock. What do you suppose the K. P. will make of it when informed? Or are you going to deny it? I think of you day and night, Nat. I shall never care for anyone else. Ever your loving D."

Nat winced. He thought: I shan't read the next letter. He wrote again. "Your divorce is still in your hands. Tell the Court anything you like, I shan't contradict you." He hesitated whether to tell her that his bank would honour a weekly cheque up to seven pounds, and decided to send that piece of information through her lawyers. In a letter, it looked too nearly like

bribery. He was sick of the whole business. He felt mean and undignified and out of temper with himself. He saw old Foulkes in the club and avoided him. He felt that he was putting up a poor show for his generation in the eyes of old Foulkes.

Then he went to see Ann.

"Did you tell Fanny about us?" he demanded.

"No," Ann hesitated, and said delicately: "Fanny is a darling but she doesn't really mind what I do. Neither does Daniel. No one minds unless you do, Nat."

"I shall mind it enormously if you do things I don't like," Nat said, trying to evade a sudden stab of guilt. "I oughtn't to let you do so much for me," he finished ruefully.

"But I wouldn't have anything if I hadn't you," Ann pointed out.

It was when he was telling Ann about his uncle that he realised what he had done to himself. He broke off in the middle of a sentence, dismayed beyond measure. He was not sure whether Ann would understand it. She did not in the least, but she understood him. Her dismay almost reflected his own.

"But your degree, Nat. All your work."

Nat rallied. "Finished," he said cheerfully. "This, my child, is where we begin to live. Service, not science. Three families out of every four buy Grimshaw products. Poor brutes . . . We shan't be rich yet. What is half of seven hundred and fifty? The firm is sending me to Bohemia next month to look at a radium mine. Will you leave this place and come with me? When we get back we'll find a home. I met Frances Polchester on the stairs just now, and her tolerant smile made me squirm. She has no right to approve of us, Ann. It shocks me. I bolted past her with my head under my arm."

Ann flung herself at him. "You didn't do this because of me?" she demanded. "There was no need. I'm earning money. I can keep us both."

"You lose your job the day we run away together," Nat said grimly. "Try Daniel."

"I can get another. I'm better at it than you'd believe."

"No use," Nat said. "You've forgotten my wife. Denny can't go on living on three pounds a week."

Ann said: "I suppose not . . . Nat, what is Denny going to do about us?"

"I don't know," Nat said unkindly. "If she likes to upset the case, she can do so. She has apparently forgotten that she left me for George Savill. Or else she thinks that should not count now. Don't look like that, Ann. I told you long ago I wouldn't divorce Denny against her will; I would do it still less when it's I who want to get out."

"Yes. But Denny is divorcing you . . . She depends on you, too. You can make terms—if you want to."

"I don't," Nat said briefly.

He knew perfectly well that he had fairly run Ann through. But with something of his mother's dreadful logic he had made up his mind that neither he nor Ann had a moral leg to stand on. He looked at Ann unkindly. He had not the slightest intention of trying to coerce his wife. Denny got her money whatever she did or failed to do. Vanity? A fine gesture? He refused to look into his motives, but he knew without looking that beside vanity there was a nagging pity for his wife, and another unexpressed emotion, not pity, on which he did not care to dwell. He gave Ann a disconcerting glance, learned from James.

"Do you mind so much, then, whether we are married or not?"

Ann thought. "No," she said finally. "No. But I should have liked you to mind for me."

Nat had nothing to say to this. He came out of a long silence to find Ann sitting very quietly, studying him with a puzzled smile. He stood staring at her. She had a forlorn air that hurt him. His heart failed.

"Darling Ann," he said. "I love you. I'm a fool and a beast to you . . . You're so *decent*."

Ann's smile went out. "Love me when I'm bad," she said queerly. "Not when I'm decent. Trying to be decent, anyhow. Oh Nat."

He set himself to comfort her . . .

A few days later he came home to find a woman he had never seen before, waiting for him in his tiny sitting-room. She was a small dark creature, middle-aged and shabby, with a yellow skin that suggested chronic dyspepsia. She did not move when he came in.

"Are you Denny's husband? You look very young. I am her sister."

"Oh, you're Judith," Nat said stiffly. He stood gazing down at Denny's sister. She did not look as he had supposed the wives of Scottish bishops to look—Church coffers fairly empty, he said to himself—and still less did she look like his wife's nearest relation. He wondered whether his episcopalian brother-in-law were lurking somewhere handy, ready to call the curse of the Church on him.

"Are you and your husband staying in town?" he asked pleasantly.

Judith flushed darkly. "My husband?"

"Yes. The bishop, you know." He threw the fellow in deliberately. Probably she considered the name a profanation on his lips.

"My husband isn't a bishop," Denny's sister said. "He was a sort of clerk. He left me a few years after I married him. He wasn't a good man."

Nat stared at her, less staggered by this sudden revelation of Denny's duplicity than by his own blunder. "I beg your pardon," he said hurriedly.

Judith smiled. "I suppose Denny told you he was a bishop,"

she said calmly. "Denny is a dreadful liar . . . I wanted to tell you that she can live with me if she likes. I've been running a school in Edinburgh since my husband went." She longed, this middle-aged woman, to tell the young man that the education had been more than respectable. Greek, German, a scholarship to Cambridge. There was hardly anything she could not have done, but for her unfortunate marriage. "Of course, Denny wouldn't be any use to me. She has no mind, you know, never had. But I can give her a home." She turned on him a friendly gaze. "I'm sure you were very kind to Denny, Mr. Grimshaw. She's been a silly girl, I think."

"I think I bored her—" Nat said abruptly. "I was rather a young ass in those days. It was very decent of her to marry me at all, and I've let her down badly."

Judith stood up. Now that she was on her feet she had an unexpected air of dignity. "I shouldn't worry too much about that," she murmured. "Denny married you to suit herself, you know. She was not—" Judith hesitated—"inexperienced." Nat had a quite distinct sense that she had chosen the word in place of another less palatable. . . .

After this astounding interview he was not unprepared for his mother to come out in defence of Denny. Emily travelled up from Saints Rew on purpose to plead his wife's cause with him.

"Denny hasn't been kind to me," she said. "But she is your wife, and you ought not to leave her to live alone. If it's true what she told Fanny, that she wants to come back, your duty is to take her. Does she want to come back?"

"Yes." Nat wondered whether she would speak for his wife if she knew why Denny had left him. He thought she would. Her unfathomable charity for the defeated and the beaten would carry her over worse places than that.

"She had no right to leave you, my darling, but that's all over now."

Nat looked at her with the smile that always turned her bones to water. "I can't go back to her, my dear. I didn't give satisfaction—I daresay the war played me out a bit. She would get tired of me again, you know. I'm an ill-conditioned brute."

His mother's humorous mouth twitched. "You were an innocent-minded baby when that girl married you," she said. "I can't forgive her for it."

"You needn't try," Nat said. "I wanted her very badly then."

"And now it's Ann you want," Emily said tragically. "Heaven knows who it will be next year. Some dreadful Spanish beauty or other."

Nat laughed at her. "Never anyone but Ann."

"Oh my dear," Emily murmured. "If Ann is kind to you, I'll bless her and love her for it all my life."

"Ann," Nat said, "is the kindest person in the world. Except yourself."

C H A P T E R xxi

NOTHING quite so fantastic as that radium mine had ever happened to Nat. It belonged to an old Count in whose castle the prospective purchasers of the mine were housed. These purchasers were the representatives of a syndicate, of which Grimshaw & Grimshaw was only one limb. The others were a German chemist (the junior director of an old London firm), a senior director of Bartons, which is not a chemical firm at all, but an immense retail house, the Mecca of suburban housewives and matrons of a gayer sort, the directors of two German firms of manufacturing chemists, M. Solomon (a French Jew), a Roumanian Jew, a Frenchman from Grasse, a Czech, and a Pole. The mine was in working. Galleries had been dug across the top of a mountain and shafts dropped. The veins of pitch blend, some very narrow, ran through the rock; it took, Nat learned, twenty tons of pitch blend to produce a grain of radium.

He was not called on to learn anything else, since experts had already appraised the value of the mine. His job was to go on repeating what Grimshaw & Grimshaw were willing to offer and to keep a small compromise in his closed hand until the last moment. It soon became apparent that no compromise would be effected. Count Wenzel was stubbornly charming, the interpreters worked like men possessed, and morning after morning the director of Bartons and an equally fat German were pushed and pulled along the narrow galleries in a passion of investigation. One day the German stuck; his groans and struggles threatened the very fabric of Europe. Nat expected the moun-

tain to fall asunder, but he was got out and tottered back to the castle in the arms of the Frenchman from Grasse. The negotiations lasted a week and at no time did the negotiators understand each other simultaneously. Every night after dinner the syndicate sat in conference with Count Wenzel and his friends and advisers, until one in the morning, until two, until three, with decanters and goblets of the finest and most delicate glass in the world standing among the candles on the great scarred table of the Emperors, as massive as the walls. Much beer, brought specially from Pilsen, was drunk, and a great quantity of wine, but nothing came of it except a monstrous freshet of talk in seven different tongues.

Nat and Ann had been given three rooms in a broad turret that hung on the valley. Both valley and castle were in a fairy tale, the castle a fantasy of stone tumbling to the valley from a great height, turrets, dungeons and rat-hole passages running straight back to the Middle Ages, and the valley a masque of Spring. Its violets and crocuses were wet with running streams, the forest behind the castle was in full green and shaken with bird songs falling like rain among the leaves. A warm west wind blew lightly, and night after night the moon rising behind the mountain made the valley mysterious and exquisite, a land-locked lake in which its trees, its flowering meadows, its little houses with candles in their windows, its castle, were reflections of themselves, clear and remote in the dim waters. In the morning the valley emerged gleaming in the sun; a shaken leaf scattered in the air crystal drops of water and splinters of bright light. It was the *terra ridentium* of the mediæval poet.

Nat was perversely restless. He walked for miles from the castle, dragging Ann with him up goat-paths and through the forest. Once he asked her abruptly whether she despised him for throwing up his work.

Ann hesitated. They were lying on a rock thrust out from the

hill side and covered thickly with pine needles from the trees behind. The biting scent of pines and the heavier scent of hidden violets were in the warm air. "No," she said. "I think it is a pity."

Nat got to his feet, and stood looking up the valley. "If Denny could have looked after herself. If Saints Rew had not emptied my father's pockets . . . I haven't the nerve or the hardness to let everything go and get on with my job. Ann, I'm a failure, I'm no good. Why do you stick to me?"

He flung himself down again and lay with his arms round her and his face out of sight. "You comfort me," he said half audibly, "you rest me and approve of me and make my life rich. Why can't I be content? . . . My little Ann, how thin you are. I wish you'd eat more."

The next day, the seventh since the negotiations began, the deal fell through. Smiling, weaving words with his beautiful old hands, Wenzel rejected the syndicate's final offer. He was their loving friend, never in his life had he enjoyed such company, such conversations round his dinner-table, his castle (all his sons had been killed in the war and his wife was long dead) would be empty when they left it, but his radium mine would remind him, until he accepted an American offer, of that superb week. It would not, after all, be possible to make a friend of the American. "Tonight, for the last time, we dine together," he said sorrowfully. "My friends, let us not sleep tonight at all."

Ann was tired, and went to bed before dinner. Narrow windows in the thick walls stood open to the straying west wind. She sat up in the trough of an enormous bed and watched Nat dressing. When he was ready he came over and sat on the edge of her bed. He was looking through one of the windows, not at her, and she studied him with a fierce intentness, the young arrogance of his pose, head held high, and smiling lips.

"Listen," Nat said, turning his head, "a nightingale, Ann,

somewhere in the valley. *Be silent nightingale, For a moment,
Till the heart sings.*"

"If my heart spoke," Ann said queerly, "it would say uncomfortable things."

"What things, then, young Ann?"

"Nat," Ann said, "when you first married Denny was it better than this?"

"Different."

"Say this is better."

Nat looked at her. "It's different, Ann."

"Say it is as good."

He got off the bed and walked away from her. "Leave me alone, Ann. I can't talk to you about all that. I don't want to. . . . Can't you understand?"

"I'm going to cry," Ann said, and did, in a desolate way that went to Nat's heart though he gave no sign of being moved by it. He watched her for a moment and said: "You're all I have, Ann, all I want."

"I'm crying for that," Ann said desperately. "Because you have so little and expected to have so much. I'm sorry I'm behaving badly. I don't often."

She heard Nat say: "I must go," and his quick footsteps crossing the room. The door shut gently and she was left alone with the small wind and the ghost of the nightingale. Her tears stopped, but she sat for a long time watching the faint pure green of the sky turn to violet and that to dusky blue, like ripening grapes. She was wondering which should be blamed, the nightingale or Nat's profile, for her late failure. Getting out of bed, she sought among her few possessions for the book in which she had begun to keep a diary; she had discovered of late that thoughts written down lose—for the writer—most of their disturbing quality. She wrote: "Tonight I made a bad blunder. I worried Nat until he looked grey and tired again. If I don't

keep quiet in myself I shall not be good for him. It must never happen again." She read it through and wrote: "When the graves open and the dead lovers turn to look for each other I shall stay in mine, for fear I see you with your first love. No grave could be too narrow if I have to lie in it alone. Oh my beautiful one, all the pains you give me are bliss; I never hoped to have you." Comforted, she went back to bed and fell asleep.

In the dining-room the flames of four fires leapt bravely, but half way between ceiling and floor leaned upon each other and left the space above to the rushing shadows. Wenzel called for more candles and more came, in great branched candlesticks, in wrought silver ones, in tall bronze ones that had been worked over lovingly by the little files of a master, a procession of candles, like a saint's feast. The beer from Pilsen was there, and champagne in long thin tapering glasses, two drinks that to mix was madness and they were mixed freely.

"We are here at this table," said Wenzel, "seven nationalities, allowing our Jewish friends one tongue apiece. We are nearly Europe, seated round a lump of elm which is indeed Europe, since here have been signed ten treaties, three covenants, five hundred pacts and ten thousand death sentences. Five Emperors have drunk at it and one died, nine Archdukes have fallen or been assassinated over it, and two Archbishops, not to speak of the company of minor princes, barons, counts, bankers, chancellors and other ruffians who have rested their elbows on it or sunk beneath it during twelve centuries." He lifted his glass to Nat. "Your father sat here in 1908. He is a little man, your father, but I swear to you that my table respected him."

"Had James Grimshaw sat at another table, in Paris, two years ago, there might have been a Peace," said M. Solomon.

The Frenchman from Grasse interrupted him. "James Grimshaw would have failed. There was once a Rome and a Carthage. There is a Paris and there was a Germany."

A Germany resurrected round the table with a vigour that set a gleam of malice in Wenzel's old eyes. A glass of great beauty was broken, it snapped at the thin neck and fell across the table unnoticed. Wenzel ground under his heel a Germany of forests, charcoal burners, gnomes, magic mountains, and towns sunk in the last enchantments of the Middle Ages. He never saw Germany except as the very image of his great-grandmother, a German woman from Berlin, very stout, domineering, and loud-voiced, with large-jointed fingers that cracked as she sat at the breakfast-table and hurt his tiny ears. He said nothing, but stretched out a great arm and filled Nat's glass.

"I tell you," a German chemist said to Nat "that on the third of March of this year your uncle spoke of our Foreign Minister as if he—the German—stood for a race of stinking dogs. There will be sanctions and sanctions until the breath is sanctioned from our windpipes and in our agony we become dogs." He went on to detail the processes of agony in metaphor more vivid than pleasant. As if ashamed himself of his words he seized his glass and emptied it. A moment later he pointed at M. Solomon, said with great distinctness: "The Jew is drunk," and laying his head on the table remained there oblivious for the rest of the night, or morning, it being now five o'clock.

"It is quite true," M. Solomon said precisely, "that we French are behaving like fiends, but the Germans are making fools of themselves, with their offers and excuses, and only the English have tried a little to be gentlemen. A difficult matter for your uncle," he added in Nat's ear. "Your father is the finest gentleman in Europe and they are both Englishmen. It is a pity they were born in two bodies, since both have quality."

Nat nodded at him. He could see himself in a glass on the wall behind Wenzel. His tie was under one ear, someone had spilt champagne down his shirt, his eyes were bright and his cheeks flushed, but he was sober, the only sober person at the

table, except Wenzel, who was gravely mad. Nat had left the wine untasted in the long glass where five reflected candles laid their yellow heads together. Of the glorious golden beer he had drunk only enough to bring him so sharply alive that he seemed to have ears in the back of his head. At one and the same moment he heard the west wind rising round the castle, the ring of flawless glass, the sighing gurgle of wine on Wenzel's palate (the old man threw each mouthful forward once before he swallowed it), the heavy breathing of the unconscious German, the scraping of M. Solomon's nails on the edge of the table, and the whinnying laughter of one of the Czechs. He reproduced somewhere at the back of his neck exactly the sound made by a little old horse. It excited Nat to hear his father's name spoken by differing tongues with the same accent of respect and affection. But all that passion of anger and indignation with which he had thought—when he had to think of it—of the bloody confusion of Europe after Versailles had suddenly died out of him. He supposed that it must have been dying a long time and he had just observed it. From now on he would no longer be moved to anger or indignation by the spectacle. Indignation belonged to these old men. If he could but have got back to his own work he would never lift his eyes from it again.

Someone said loudly: "The next war," and he reflected that the next would probably blow himself and his work out of the possibility of seeing and hearing anything at all. The Frenchman from Grasse said suddenly: "They say the old men made the War, but we are all old men here, except that one"—(he nodded at Nat)—"and we would take no hand in destroying Germany."

"Crack, crack, like great guns," old Wenzel said loudly. Nobody understood him.

"It was not old men who went about during the war presenting white feathers. It was young women. Safe at home."

The director of Bartons shrugged his fat shoulders and said

deliberately: "Any woman of whatever age, race or faith, who votes for war or has the impudence to urge a man to war is a—." He was certainly very drunk indeed, for not only was the epithet he used unspeakably impolite, but at no time in the sobriety of fifty-nine years had such thoughts occurred to his mind, let alone his tongue. Sober, he would have been hard to convince that he had such thoughts in him.

M. Solomon smiled his melancholy smile, the dreadful endurance of his race before tragedy. "Consider the monstrous pride of the Spartan mother . . . 'with his shield or on it' . . . the tender child of her body. Consider the frightful words: *I gave my husband*. No, not impudence, but the poor dupes of flags and drums hiding their sad torn hearts. Oh God, I weep. I weep for women whom we persuade to bear us children and then to let us arrange for them to die screaming."

"I had a friend who was scythed in half at Hamel," Nat said abruptly.

"The deuce you did. Was it unpleasant?"

"Very."

"Ah, my friends," shouted Wenzel, "we all hate war but we all love a good soldier." His eyes fell on the director of his radium mine, a little wizened German who had been in his service for thirty years. "Drink with me," he ordered. The director of the mine stood up, drank, smiled, and caught at a candle to save himself from falling. The hot wax ran over his hand and tears sprang to his eyes which he wiped away furtively with his fingers, like a well-bred woman. He was a very sentimental little man and for the last hour he had been thinking that he had known his friend and fellow-German the burgomaster (who was sitting opposite him) for forty years, and yet they had never called each other *du*. Surely there came a moment in the lives of two friends when their hearts might without impropriety overflow towards each other. He was sitting next to Nat, and to him

in difficult South German he put the question. Was it fitting for him now to address the burgomaster as *du*?

"I should ask him," Nat said kindly.

The director of the mine sighed. Something less cautious, something that would put a splendid crown on their long intimacy which nothing had disturbed (why, good gracious, they had once in their youth shared a young woman rather than one have what the other had not), something startling, stupendous, expressive of the noble profundity of his emotions, was what he desired. He turned to his other neighbour, the director of Bartons.

It took the Englishman a long time to understand what was required of him, but when he did, no doubts assailed him. He got to his feet, and planting his heaving mass firmly on the little man's scruples, crushed them to death. "You there," he shouted at the burgomaster, "yes, you. Upon my word, I'll *du* you myself in a minute. I like you, you're a fine fellow. And so is your friend here. Yes he is, by George he is—but let him speak for himself." And he sat down again with a suddenness that did him no credit.

Trembling and pale as death, the director of the mine put the question to his friend. With the most delicate gesture in the world he laid his heart, torn bleeding from his breast by the Englishman's brutal good-humour, before the burgomaster, and waited with closed eyes for the word that would crown or wreck the friendship of a lifetime.

The burgomaster stammered like a young girl in her first love-affair. "*Du*," he murmured, "*du*. Ich—Ich liebe dich." He collapsed, smiling, and blowing kisses from his five podgy fingers. The director of the mine stood up in his turn. He swayed dangerously and had to be held up on one side by Nat and on the other by the director of Bartons, who did his share by the simple means of wedging his broad back between the little German and

his chair. So supported he made a long sentimental speech in his soft German. He spoke of his mother, of his first sensations in the sunlit mountain village of his birth, of his school days, of the university, of the burgomaster as a young man, his friend, his hero, of walking in the forest carrying the guitar on which his friend would at last play with ravishing skill, of his friend's prowess, with the sword, with the tankard, in love; he described their marriages (celebrated on the same day) and the providential death of their wives within two hours of each other, so that neither was left in enjoyment of a possession the other had lost. Then he spoke of friendship itself, and how it was the salt of food and the body of wine, how it sweetened the breath of life and surpassed the love of woman. And all the time the burgomaster nodded his head and repeated at intervals *du, du*, like a mechanical toy.

Then the little director sank back into the arms of the stout Englishman, who drenched him with baptismal champagne in an attempt to drink to him and his friend. Every man began to talk at once, in the language he had used to utter his first words; no one listened to anyone else, and if Wenzel had reckoned his guests at seven tongues there were now at least eight, for M. Solomon, the French Jew, the supporter of M. Briand, the lover of Verdi and Massenet, imagined himself to be in Galicia and was babbling endearments to a mother who had had the misfortune to be massacred in a mercifully sudden fashion fifty years earlier. No one understood him, least of all his fellow Jew, who was talking to himself with a frightened air, as if he had remembered that his race was not always kindly entreated at the table where he now sat, the fingers of one hand wrapped round the stem of a glass and the other at his ear. Now what on earth, Nat wondered, was he trying, in this room, to hear?

Nat pushed back his chair and surveyed the company. He was half dead with fatigue and spent excitement, and looking at his

watch he saw that it was now seven o'clock. He must get out of this.

The candles had not been replaced for some time and most were burning to their end. The fires still fought a losing battle with the shadows. These dropped from the roof, slid along the walls, pressed up to the table, giving each guest a sprawling and grotesque double. Wenzel sat upright. He looked tired, as if his great dinner had somehow disappointed him. Perhaps he would have been more amused if there had been one face of his own at the table. As it was, the dinner was only another memory to be added to the store of incommunicable memories which he would shortly carry out of the world, and with them his name, his family which had survived every European war except the latest, and all that mediæval mind which had found its last habitation in him and his kind. There would be no more of his race in Bohemia or in Europe anywhere. He was almost certain that there would soon be no Europe, at least as he had known it.

Nat got out unnoticed, except by Wenzel, who smiled at him. From the anteroom he walked straight out into the garden. The west wind still blew softly; scattered through the grass and under every tree the flowers gleamed with fresh colours, and in the dazzling sunlight thrushes were singing as he had never heard thrushes sing. No spring morning at Saints Rew provided so shattering an ecstasy of sound. Nat's heart stood still. He shivered, as he did at the first unearthly notes of the bird music in *Siegfried*. What was it? Ah . . . *Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone!*

He wondered whether Ann heard them and that sent him flying back, and up to her room. She was asleep, and he woke her to listen to the thrushes. She leaned against him with a sigh of pleasure.

"Forgive me for the stupid things I said last night," he said humbly.

"They don't matter, Nat."

"Ah but they do. I'm a fool. I put things in a way no one could accept."

Ann sat up suddenly. "Nat. You haven't been to bed."

"What do I look like?" He got up to look at himself. His reflection, hair ruffled, wine stains covering the front of his shirt, stared at him with bright eyes.

"You look a rake and unutterably attractive," Ann said.

"I look revolting," Nat murmured. "Do you loathe me?" He stumbled across the room and flung himself into her arms. "Don't look at me. How cool you are . . . Ann . . . love."

C H A P T E R xxii

EMILY sat up in bed that Nat and Ann had taken for themselves when they came back from Bohemia, and with the hair slowly rising upon her scalp read a peculiarly horrifying story. As the worst moment of all approached she gave a little shriek, stifled instantly. It was nearly one o'clock and she had promised Ann to go to sleep. With a sigh she thrust the book under her pillow and tried to compose her mind. Not unnaturally it declined to be fobbed off with gentle thoughts.

She switched on her lamp again and looked round the room. It was so small, smaller even than the room she had slept in at Chelsea, that she could reach almost everything except the handle of the door without getting out of her bed. Lifting a corner of the blind she looked out. The room hung over London from a point about half-way up the northern heights. The town lay far below, in a great pit, full of fantastic shapes, squared and angular, nothing gentle, and stabbed with stilettos of light. It left her free to arrange in it the London of her youth: how she had loved it! Dancing, at Marlborough House, at Devonshire House, rooms full of tall handsome twinkling men, and herself in white, always white with lilies of the valley on her shoulder, Bond Street in sunshine, the elegant nearly empty windows, and Piccadilly Circus filled, yes filled with violets and daffodils. Queer that just by marrying James Grimshaw she should have set out on the journey that had brought her here. And discovering, as she did again and again, that she was old, immensely old, wrinkled, and tired, she brought herself back in

a panic to the moment. So little time left now. Look at each moment, look even at this ridiculous flat, before it was snatched away from her for ever. On a stormy night, Ann said, the singing of the wind in the trees below and the flying smother of cloud out there, lent the crazy little place all the sounds and sensations of a ship riding at anchor in a rising sea. As if, Ann said, it might any moment break loose and float off through the air. Like the old woman who went up in a basket as high as the moon.

Emily had not meant, when she came, to spend a night. But for that unexpected faintness (her heart was supposed to be wearing out, and no wonder, she thought) she would now be back in her bedroom at Saints Rew. She disapproved of the affair violently. It was hasty and unconsidered and, of course, disgraceful. But she could not, when she thought about it, disregard an essential logic. If Nat's wife were really putting a stop to that deceitful case (had she not written to Emily herself and to Fanny announcing that she was and her reason—to save Nat from Ann—for doing it?) what were Nat and Ann to do? Except ignore her?

Emily gave herself a little shake. She had caught herself out again in the assumption that Ann and her son were in some natural and inevitable relationship to each other, which Denny was wantonly opposing. Whereas the opposite was actually true. Denny was Nat's wife, with whom he had refused to live, and Ann and Nat were living together outside the sanction of decent people.

Emily sighed. Even if the case had gone through, would things have been any better? Only the look of them. In reality, Denny would still be Nat's wife. Shutting and opening her tired old hands, Emily felt again the pang of mortal anguish which had seized her when she thought of the boy taking his wife. It had been shameful of her to allow such thoughts, and to suffer from

them. She had got in the end the better of them, but the *fact* remained, Nat and Denny had become one flesh. And that being damnably so, what did it matter whether Nat's wife did or did not squash her divorce? I haven't lived all these years, Emily said to herself, to trouble at the end of them about the look of things.

She was unhappy nevertheless. She did not like the isolation to which Nat and Ann had condemned themselves. She was disappointed that they could have no children. She would have liked to be able to say of Ann—"my daughter-in-law, Nat's wife"—even if in her heart of hearts she had to acknowledge that Ann was not and never would be Nat's wife, thanks to that boyish dreadful folly that bound him to Denny.

To her amazement, simply tumbled over by the rise in her of one of those uncontrollable tides of feeling, she found herself saying that she acknowledged nothing of the sort. She did not feel that Denny was Nat's wife. She did not believe it at all. She never had, never did, and never would. The most ingenuous smile in the world played about her mouth. "I ought to practise believing it," she whispered. Eyelids the colour of old ivory fluttered delicately over her eyes. She wanted enormously to laugh at herself, at the preposterous wickedness of her mind, at life that played such tricks on people. Instead of which she began hurriedly to think about Ann and the childish gravity of Ann's housekeeping.

Ann's accounts were the most pathetic sight in the world. She had made herself a series of little bags among which she distributed the week's money. The little bags were always in debt to each other, and their finances rapidly became so complicated that only a Reparations Commission could have grappled hopefully with them. Emily was reminded of her own exasperated efforts in the Chelsea flat. She sighed and smiled. That flat! Piercing, humorous, bitter, the memories unrolled behind her

eyes . . . Nat, heartbreakingly boyish and attractive in his khaki uniform, balanced on the arm of a chair, coaxing Denny into good humour. (He never coaxes Ann, Emily thought.) Nat looking at Denny with a mischievous smile, half lover, half teasing boy . . . Denny's sweet drawling voice. "Dear little mother!" She thought about Nat's wife with a strange pity. Denny's dreadful childish vanity, her stupidity, even her selfishness, were less bitter to Emily now that the boy had escaped from them . . . The poor woman must be very lonely . . . All at once she remembered the disturbing night when Denny cried with pain in the bed in Nat's room. It had always been difficult to reconcile that helpless whimpering girl with the elegant young woman, the face lotions, the postures, and the hearty appetite. But of course they actually lived together in the house of the soul. What illness and defeat did to Denny was to strip off the protective vanity. The spectacle was not pleasant. Emily wrinkled her nose. The girl had made Nat suffer. She had taken his boy's body, used it and him, and then failed him as badly as only a vain stupid selfish woman could. "I am not sorry for her," Emily said loudly.

Two o'clock. Emily had just stretched out a guilty hand to her lamp when a frightful anguished cry broke the silence of the tiny flat. Trembling violently, she listened: what could have wrung that sound from the boy? Then she got up and trotted across the landing to the door of Nat's room.

She turned the handle with steady fingers. Ann looked up at her gravely; she had curved her little body protectively over Nat, one arm under his head and the other arched across him. Nat sighed and settled himself more easily, digging his head into the girl's thin shoulder. Emily could see his slight body relaxing in that comforting clasp. She stood very still. Then Ann smiled at her over Nat's dark head, a radiant drowsy smile, as if she had been showing Emily her own child, not Emily's.

Emily crept away.

For a long time she stood in the middle of her room, oblivious of fatigue and the coldness of the floor under her bare feet. She was not thinking of her son and his kind young lover. She was thinking that she would be very frightened when she was dead. She thought of death as an immensity of twilit space, and of herself as alone in it. Her mind recalled to her that on the night before Nat's birth she had stood like this beside her bed, alone and frightened. Now her body was burdened only with time, and the son she carried in it then had gone from her utterly. She lifted her head, listening. Everything was quiet. Whatever had terrified the boy was gone and he was safe. . . .

In the morning Ann said: "I'm sorry it happened when you were here, darling. Nat hasn't cried out like that for ages."

"What is it?" Emily said. She had turned pale.

"I don't know," Ann said calmly. "I think—the war. I don't know what he sees . . . Sometimes he tells me stories that make me feel sick. I would never tell him things like that even if I had seen them. But he's getting better, you know. He used to scream at night often. Now he hardly ever does. I think he'll soon forget it altogether. Or not see it . . . The first time it happened it—frightened me." Ann lifted her eyes, clear, ready at any moment to narrow in her shy delicious smile, and said: "I comfort him."

What could she do for the child! "Oh darling," Emily wailed, "it's all *dreadful*. You're too young to have to deal with such things. That devilish war. How I hate it. How I hate Daniel and all of them. Beasts and devils. They should be whipped naked through the town at the cart's tail. My poor Nat . . . It's too much for you, Ann."

But she did not really think that it was too much for Ann. She took Ann for granted, much as Nat did. Though Ann was eight years the younger she did not feel about her as she had

once felt about Denny. It never occurred to her that Ann was not perfectly able to look after herself.

Ann knew it. In a way she took herself for granted. That is to say, she took for granted Nat's frayed nerves, his need of her, and the merciless demands he made on her the whole time. He came for comfort like a child. She had to soothe and sustain him and fill him with belief in himself. Sometimes her body ached with the effort. She felt exhausted and empty. But she never took her hold on him for granted. As to that she concealed a monstrous uncertainty. . . .

When Emily got back to Saints Rew she was very tired. She sat down in the room at the end of the corridor and gazed through the window at the avenue of limes. A fresh garden smell of earth and sunwarmed leaves came up to her. She had left the door open and after a time she saw James looking for her along the corridor. He usually looked for her when she first came home and after that forgot her again. He came in and stood beside her, a shabby little man.

Emily leaned against him and closed her eyes. "I saw Nat and Ann," she said dreamily. "Ann is very good to the boy. She looks after him. Fanny says it is not considered good taste now to look after your husband. You leave him free and he leaves you free. When he runs off with another young woman you say: 'Tiresome of you, but good hunting,' and if he dies you have him burned. It all seems to me extraordinarily dull, but I suppose they enjoy it in their gloomy way. Ann's not like that, thank heaven."

James smiled at her engagingly. "Nat is a lucky young man then?"

"I hope he knows it," Emily said severely, "but it would be no use my telling him. No one ever takes the least notice of me."

"I don't suppose he does. None of us do . . . I never notice myself that I married the most remarkable woman in the world

. . . I daresay you thought I spent our money on the house without noticing it. I daresay you've had a poor shabby lover. But a lover, Emily. You've been everything. You've worked in my house like any of its servants. You've gone without all the things women are supposed to need. You're the kindest and most loyal friend a man ever had. My dear."

"Well," Emily said, "I suppose you mean it now." It was a queer enough summary of all the lovers' speeches he had not made and the caresses he had forgotten to give her. "It's been worth it," she said quickly. "You've been worth it."

C H A P T E R xxiii

At the very moment that James came into the "ship" room at Saints Rew in search of his Emily, Nat was ringing Mrs. Clemens's bell in Queen Street. The door was opened by a middle-aged woman wearing a hat so firmly wedged to her head that it might be presumed she slept in it, who on his asking for Mrs. Clemens drew him mysteriously into the dark passage and told him that she had just come from burying Mrs. Clemens. Four mornings since, the first-floor gentleman, rising at his usual time and finding outside his door clean shoes but no hot water, had begun ringing his bell for Mrs. Clemens. Nothing happening, he kept his finger on the bell for ten minutes, but Mrs. Clemens having died suddenly half-an-hour earlier he got no answer until the daily woman arrived, entered the kitchen, and screamed. She went on screaming until she had roused the house, and then ran home, and nothing was done in the house (except to dispose decently of Mrs. Clemens on her narrow hardly cold bed) until the middle-aged woman, a relative, arrived from the country to take charge. Nat had a confused but distinct impression that the first-floor had kept his finger on the bell during all these happenings until early in the afternoon, when he got his quietus. "I settled him," the woman said. Probably rammed him with that dreadful hat, Nat thought.

She took Nat to examine a small pile of letters which, unable to find in any of Mrs. Clemens's drawers a record of the present addresses of their owners, she had been about to hand back to the postman. Among them was one for Nat from his lawyers.

It informed him that the decree against him had been made absolute a week earlier. So Denny had let it go through. . . . He thrust the letter into his pocket and looked at the others. There were two for George. These he re-addressed to the Foreign Office and offered to post them. Saying goodbye absently to Mrs. Clemens's relative, he stepped out again into the street and stood there for a few moments looking up at the house. He could not believe that Mrs. Clemens was gone. It was impossible to imagine her anywhere but in this house, slipping along its passages, toiling up its stairs with trays, lifting blinds, shutting doors, holding the old walls together by the sheer force of her dignified servitude. He knew nothing of that dimming picture of fields and running water nor of the girl who lived on beside them with enough tenacity left in her to come to his help on more than one occasion.

Mrs. Clemens's death disturbed him profoundly. So long as she was alive he had been able to leave his nineteen-year-old self shut securely, and quite contented, in the little bedroom which she should not let, she said, to anyone else. Now that she was dead, and the house given over to strangers, he might meet the fellow round any corner, and not know what to say to him.

He was just thinking this, ridiculously, and looking up at a 'bus passing him in Piccadilly . . . there was Denny sitting on top, at the front. She did not see him; when the 'bus drew up a yard or two in front of him, she did not move, looking straight ahead. His heart leaped. With a sharp quickened sense he took in every detail of her slender elegance, the wide hat, the delicate fairness of her skin, the pretty stupid eyes under the fly-away eyebrows. Standing among the people crowding the step, he half expected to see his younger self dash past him and up the stairs . . . "Why, Denny, I thought you said you weren't coming out." Her glance slid over him, thrilling him unspeakably. "I changed my mind." . . . Could it possibly be that some spark,

still alive in him, flared up at sight of her, wanted her again, the ecstasy, the light-hearted passion, the exquisite suffering and anguish of those days? He did not believe it. When the 'bus moved off, and Denny, perched up in front, diminished until she was only a pale blur that if he took his eyes off it would be lost, he was sure he did not. Dropping George's letters in a pillar-box he thought: "That's finished, then," and turned to go home to Ann.

He found Ann frowning over her little bags. Very flat and empty they looked. After dinner she asked him suddenly whether he would always have to give Denny half his income.

Nat stiffened. "Why not?"

"Well, no reason," Ann said, "except that there are two of us and only one of Denny and I'm a fool about money. I must try to get work now. After all, there must be somebody who needs a very nice girl with five languages and a good temper."

Nat was silent. He was surprised to find how acutely he represented the thought of Ann out typing some brute's letters, coming home tired and pale, when he wanted her. It was not, he told himself, as if she were going to do anything worth doing. After a while, he told her, too.

Ann glanced at him. "We can't all be great scientists," she said smoothly.

Nat winced as if she had unexpectedly hit him. He felt the muscles in his face twitching with anger. How dare she twit him with failure. He looked furiously at her round bent head; she never moved, she was shameless. He actually hated her.

"I won't be spoken to like that," he said.

Ann longed to put her arms round his slight rigid body. The longing fought with another instinct in her and was defeated. "If I must spend my life being careful not to offend you," she said calmly, "I'd better go now." Can't you see that my heart

is breaking? she asked him silently and bitterly. Will you never give way to me?

"You needn't," Nat said, trembling. "I'll go myself."

"When? Tonight? Where shall you go?"

"Tomorrow. What does it matter where I go?"

"Well, nothing," Ann said. "I don't mind."

Nat had turned pale. "You do mind," he said furiously. "How dare you say you don't? You're a fool. Damn you, Ann."

And now, Ann thought, I can bear no more. She had borne everything, his moods, his dreadful depressions, his crying that he was a failure, the war, had given him faith and supported him with her own strength, had endured even the anguish of knowing herself a poor second to his faithless wife, and now he had said: You're a fool, and Damn you. It was too much, she was beaten, she could not fight any more to get from Nat what he would never give her. To her horror she felt tears behind her eyes, and ashamed of this last evidence of her defenceless state, she turned to hurry away from him.

"Ann."

She turned round again and saw Nat looking at her with the same haggard unkind face that had just proved too much for her. It changed as she stared at him and took on the appealing secret look it wore when Nat flung himself in her arms to be comforted, the face with which he bent over her for the last time before turning off the light and falling asleep, as close to her as possible. Ann's small body shook with a delicious weakness. Surely Nat would come to her now? Surely this was, at last, one of her moments.

Nat did come, in one of his swift disconcerting rushes. But not to comfort her. To carry her to a chair and then to put his head on her knee and burst into tears. He cried bitterly and uncontrollably, not at all as she supposed men cried. It was dreadful; it shattered her, and filled her with an extraordinary excite-

ment. She laid her hands gently on his head. If her heart had been breaking with grief, it now broke finally under the weight of her love. It flew into a thousand pieces that sprang away in every direction like the scatter of drops from a fountain. Dizzily she felt them penetrating every part of her. The fountain was her love for Nat. It gushed over them both in a warm comforting flood. She could not speak to him. She sat still, with her hands on his head, and felt herself dissolving in an agony of bliss.

"I must be mad," Nat said. "I love you more than anything in the world."

Ann thought she said: "Oh I shall die of this love."

"I don't know what made me behave like that. I love you . . . Don't ask me anything about Denny's money again. I don't care in the least what happens to her—I saw her this afternoon and it didn't matter at all—but I've got to look after her. You don't mind that, do you?"

"Give her all of it," Ann murmured.

Nat sat up. "I shan't want to give her any more," he said. "But she can keep what she's got. Ann, let's get married very soon."

"But—can we?" Ann said, wondering.

Nat began to search his pockets for the lawyers' letter. It had suddenly become immensely important to him to claim Ann publicly. He wanted the fact of their being in love to be made as public as possible. Only in that way could the world, all the people whom he loathed when they pressed against him in omnibuses and on the pavements, his uncle, old Foulkes, be made to hedge the inviolability of their hidden life.

CHAPTER xxiv

BUT before Nat and Ann could legalise their marriage, though Nat plunged into the extravagance of a special license, life whisked about and showed them an entirely altered face. James Grimshaw died.

He died suddenly, sitting at a table with the Prime Minister, his brother Daniel, and one or two other gentlemen almost as important. For a strange thing had been happening, starting very soon after the evening when James lost a friend, nothing less than the slow return to political favour of James Grimshaw himself. It really seems as though the English crowd, in other respects little better, whatever we like to think, than the French or the German or the American crowd, has a relatively lower boiling-point, and having reached it becomes secretly and quickly ashamed of itself and tries to put things right. However that may be, public tongues and pens, having reached a nadir of injustice and violence in their dislike of him, had a change of heart and began to treat him first with civility and at last with respect.

It might only have been a freak of time that this change of heart towards the man who had done what he could to prevent the war came about at a moment when the last hopes of a new world after Versailles—they had been trailing, poor wounded birds, their wings a long time—died and were hastily shovelled out of sight. Where they could no longer offend the eyes and noses of the deluded ones. But James had been called in . . . The very next thing he said to his Emily, after that belated dec-

laration, was: "I must go up to town tomorrow. *They have sent for me.*"

He watched her as he said it, like a child making a stupendous announcement at the risk of suffering agonies of mortified pride if it falls flat. He ought to have known Emily better (he did, actually).

She said: "Darling. I knew they'd have to call you in to get them out of the mess they have made of things. Fools! You ought to say: Damn you, get yourselves out. But you won't, of course." . . .

He had so few illusions and no ambition. He had been happiest of all when he was an obscure senior clerk, able to gather, quietly and laboriously, adding fact to fact like leaves falling and silting together in the recesses of a forest, his amazing, his unparalleled knowledge of a blood-soaked Europe. He had the history of France as few Frenchmen have it. The very roads themselves, that must know by heart the pressure of refugees' feet and the cries and tears and blood of the harried, the wounded, and the dying, know no more than he did. He knew every time the armies of the Great War opened an old wound and pressed on old graves. There were moments when it seemed to James that the whole tale of Europe might be compressed into one picture of a peasant dead across his own shattered threshold.

When he went to the I.I. he lost most of his freedom and gained a very little power. How little, he knew long before he was turned out. He could gather and arrange his facts. He could see that these were not faked in his department. He could pass them to the Cabinet in any form he liked. But he could not dictate how they should be used. He could not save one mother from the anguish of her son's death. He could not save one young man from a frightful useless agony.

He thought of great men who, in their lifetime, seem to have lifted themselves, and the race of men with them, into purer air.

But the air becomes filled with poison gas and the screaming of deadly and deadlier instruments for the shattering of limbs, the tearing-out of entrails, the murdering of reasons, all the mediæval tortures on a wider scale and directed by an advanced intelligence. The faith that sustains great men in their efforts was not in him. He was without hope. . . . He was very kind to everything young, everything weak, oppressed, or in disgrace.

He *knew* that there is no salvation, of all those salutations promised, except men are kind to men.

There was no moment, during all his obscure years of work in the Foreign Office, when he would not have been willing (not without a tremor—he was an imaginative man) to die with every conceivable accompaniment of torture devised by human ingenuity if he could by doing it have ended all war. Once, during the war, he heard George Savill's father speak of it as the *first* World War. An anguish, greater than any physical anguish he had ever known, pierced him. Drops of sweat stood out on his forehead. He sat huddled up in his armchair with bent head until he could trust himself to stand up and get out of the room. He really thought he had been in hell.

And yet. So strange, tortuous, and inexplicable are the workings of the human heart, that he was pleased to have been called back to the council table. He saw himself already in power (his mind even used that phrase, of which he knew the frightful emptiness), and restoring to Saints Rew some of the things he had sold. Particularly he regretted a globe of exquisite fine glass, egg-shell thin, and the colour of a shallow pool in which the blue March sky is reflected, on which he had once seen a child gazing with such reverence that he never afterwards thought of the globe without thinking of Nat. . . .

The conference he had been invited to attend was private and informal. It concerned itself only with the question of reparations. Used to reading minds quicker than faces James was not

long in feeling a kind of uneasiness round the table. At first, with a sensitive pang, he imagined it due to his presence. But he very quickly understood that his companions were not afraid of him but of themselves. Daniel talked loudly about sanctions and the screws to be applied if their late enemy did not pay up. They listened to him almost in silence. . . . He began to describe the ways by which the Reparations Commission had just assessed the total damage done to the Allies.

James had a strange sensation of pressure over his heart. The stupendous, the incredible task performed by the Commission shook him. Dealing, among shifting exchanges, with figures so large as to be nearly meaningless, they had contrived by a super-human effort of will and ingenuity, to reckon the amount of gold required to fill up the frightful wounds of the war. I'm getting very old, James thought. Old, old. The weight of all that gold, the pain of all those wounds, pressed on him.

For the second time in his life, he thought he was in hell. We are all damned, he said to himself. Devils and damned. An indescribable terror and anguish filled him.

Daniel passed him a note across the table. He opened it on his knee.

Four words. "Are you all right?"

He nodded at his brother. A strange delicate smile just brushed his lips.

He half stood up, resting his hands on the table. "I think we have all," he said, "I mean all the countries that fought . . . done a dreadful thing. We have allowed millions of men to be pushed violently out of life, many before they had tasted it (we only live once on this earth—*think what I am saying*), we have sentenced millions more to suffer atrocious pains and fears, we have burned and laid waste, we have given whole nations cause for bitter useless tears. What does it matter, in face of this—tragedy—whether Germany is evading us or not? Payment.

Payment? It would be more decent and more profitable to wipe out all that. The payment is made, gentlemen." He halted and said again: "The payment is made."

He looked round at their faces, sighed, sat down in his place, and smiled at Daniel. He slipped sideways in his chair and died.

It was nearly two hours before Nat came. He found his father laid on a couch in an adjoining room. There was no one with him but Daniel. Dying had not added anything to Jame's stature. He looked what he had looked in life, a very shabby little man. But an air of youth did invest the lined face, like a light in a little old lantern. Nat was not surprised by this. As he looked at his father, he felt that there a young man did lie dead, while he, infinitely older, survived.

He remembered suddenly that he had promised to give James another lesson in bridge that evening. If his uncle had not been with them he would have cried.

Daniel was visibly moved. Sitting on a chair beside his brother, he seemed smaller, as if James in dying had withdrawn part from a store of life they held in common. He said gloomily to Nat: "He was talking of writing off the debts and all that. I don't know what he mightn't have got them to do if he'd lived. . . ." A relieved expression crossed his face. Nat could see, through their real and decent grief, his eyes taking stock of a board from which the incalculable had suddenly been removed. Daniel knew where he was now. He faced only familiar dangers, the chances of the political game, the accustomed gestures of diplomacy. And what would once have roused the young man to a fury of loathing and indignation now hardly moved him at all. He looked at Daniel and thought: You'll be able to make a rare dirty mess of things now. *I don't care. I'm through all that.*

"He knew more than all of us put together," Daniel exclaimed. "Look, he sent me these notes last week." He pulled out of his pocket a bundle of slips, on the top one of which Nat read:

"Mem: that you are really treating with my old enemy and friend Poincaré. M. Briand will be pulled down by the legs one day soon. Say six months. His country is crazed with pride and fear. Do not be angry with them." He remembered his father saying of France: "that *dear* country," in a tone of ineffable longing and affection. . . .

He saw Perry Smith at the other side of the couch. Perry's face wore the air of amused tolerance with which he had received every event of his short life in the trenches, from a general with the wind up to the tearful German who had emerged round a traverse in the middle of an attack with a boot-brush in one hand and a copy of Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* in the other. He smiled at Nat, who nodded to him. . . . He wished the dead did not come back.

But the thought of Perry, who had died to give Daniel a chance of saving England, was no longer bitter. He no longer wanted to stop Daniel. He wanted nothing but Ann, and to be let alone.

Daniel said: "He couldn't have done anything with the French. They're impossible. Mad with victory and nerves. . . . I know what you think of me. But I tell you I'd make those Frenchmen see reason if I could. . . . How can you see reason when all you see is your devastated country? Suppose the Boche had burned Saints Rew? . . . What are you going to do about Saints Rew? It's yours now."

"I don't know. Look after it," Nat said. He saw the house as it would be this afternoon, in the blazing sun. He always saw it from a point half-way across the gardens at the front of the house, the grey walls rising from the turf, the doorway that led into the first of the small orchards, the high lovely gate dividing garden from park, the old smooth turf, as delicate as our English airs, as green as our English fields where streams are. His mother opened the gate and crossed the lawn; a young deer

trotted up to the gate after her and stood there for a moment before turning away into the park, out of sight.

“On your salary?” his uncle was saying. Daniel came round the couch and stood between James and his son. He could not imagine what on earth the boy was thinking about, staring at his father like that. He had been sorry for Nat, worked up by that . . . that salacious young woman into marrying her when he was still too much of a child to know what she wanted him for. Or what she was. The boy had been a fool. . . . He was not sorry that James’s boy had been a fool. It put him, Daniel, in a position he found agreeable. And after all he was fond of the boy. A slender, a very engaging, young man. Fanny said that Ann had one of those deep quiet passions for him; couldn’t talk about it, hardly ever used his name. That was a pity; since the child would get herself hurt. Look at himself, how he had loved his Fanny. And had hurt her. He said abruptly:

“I’ll give you back your father’s tenth share in Grimshaw and Grimshaw. And treble your salary. If you’ll give me your word not to make over any of the money to that wife of yours, and to stay in the firm. At least until you’re my age. I want someone of my own to carry it on when I’m dead.”

“I shan’t give Denny any more money,” Nat said indifferently. “She has enough. But as for carrying on—I don’t know.”

“You won’t sell Saints Rew,” Daniel exclaimed in dismay.

Nat almost yawned. He felt infinitely tired. “Oh go away,” he said. “I want to be left alone. Please get out now. . . . You’re very generous. I’m not ungrateful. But please go away.”

A moment later he was actually alone. Except for his father. He had lost any impulse to cry. He thought that he would probably cry later: when he told his mother: or Ann. But at the moment he felt only an intolerable grief that his father should have died just now, when he looked like getting back his lost command. They ought never to have turned him out. And hav-

ing turned him out, they ought to have let him be. Not killed him with the shock of coming back and seeing them at their damned dirty games. It must have been that, or something like that. For James did not look serene. He merely looked finished. As if he were saying: "I'm done. Do what you like."

From the window of the room, half-way up the house, he could see a strip of Whitehall, and the top of a tree. His father had once pointed out to him that the English were inconceivably sentimental about trees. They let them grow anywhere. He did not know, but he thought it likely that there was a tree in the prison yard where men were hanged. Now in America you were electrocuted in a room, probably centrally heated. Unless you had the misfortune to suffer lynch law and be burned alive. . . . Suddenly Nat saw that his father, who had had intimates in the chancellories of a dozen nations, and spoke of himself, half jestingly, as a European, had been passionately English. England had perhaps been his only illusion.

It explained his love for Saints Rew. It explained why a man who had never been shaken by any of the irregular recurring crises of mob patriotism, who was a saint for kindness, who had served all his life a naked passion for truth and for justice, had behaved to his wife, to his son, with injustice, with grudgingness, with blindness, had half starved his wife, had done his son out of decent clothes, uncracked shoes, and the chance of working under Mayer, all for Saints Rew, as if Saints Rew were his wife and his son. As if Emily and Nat were less real and less near to him than that exquisite old fabric of grey stone; as if that faultless turf needed to be watered by his Emily's secret tears and winnowed by his son's frustrated boyish longings.

He had so loved Saints Rew because it was as much of England as any man may hold in his heart. When he looked at it on a day like this, in the sunlight of late May, he saw and heard England, people going about their business over lonely roads, in

lanes and streets of towns, the sounds of cricket played on countless village pitches, the race-horses with slender nervous legs stepping delicately along the roads round the downs, the speech of the cold green streams to their banks, men (like that fellow on the skyline, heavily patiently deftly turning his horses at the end of the furrow) bending over the fields, the clang of hammers in the shipyards, the flame-riven smoke of furnaces seen at night under the immensity of black sky.

Saints Rew had been built in the days when England first became conscious of herself. It was the gesture of a country no longer half expectant of invasion, ruin, a gesture proud and restrained. There was not a superfluous line in Saints Rew, the most intricate decoration was always in an obscure place, on pipe heads or in dark passages, and on the inner sides of cupboard doors. Nat remembered a remarkable piece of carving discovered at the base of the panelling in a small powder-closet, when some workmen were repairing a burst pipe. Saints Rew did not thrust its beauties at every chance comer, any more than did the downs against which it was built. A man had to live in the place to see it. Then one day—it might be a day of clouds and soft air—something in the curve of the downs above the valley, some grey limpid light in the quiet sky, or a sudden flurry of rooks above the chimneys, reached out and struck the watcher over the heart. So that never again did any corner of the earth content him. So that this became his place. For him England.

It was in the true ironic tradition that the most rabid Englishman of them all should have been thrown out of office because England was in danger.

An ambulance had turned into the street. Nat swung round to look at his father. This was probably what they had sent for, to take James to his brother's house, since a man cannot be allowed to lie dead in the high places of His Majesty's Govern-

ment. Nat supposed that Daniel had already given the necessary orders. "I shall have to go down to Saints Rew," he thought and his heart started. Ann first, and then his mother.

He kissed his father. Gently, despairingly, trying to put into the caress an assurance that he understood what James had been after, and why he had sacrificed them all to Saints Rew. He felt old, but not old enough, not tired enough. He felt that he ought to have been tired to death, so that they would carry him away, too. His body moved heavily across the room, away from the couch.

There was a knock on the door. The handle turned.

CHAPTER xxv

NAT and Ann were married a fortnight later, in June: under the eyes of a bored registrar, his clerk (who had a cold in the head and no handkerchief), Emily, and Lord Grimshaw. His uncle was very gloomy, having just been insulted at a public luncheon by the senator for Corsica, who held forth to him at great length and in an unabashed voice on the "*cynicisme effroyable*" of the English.

"I detest all these people," he grumbled, standing on the edge of the pavement and waving at a taxi. "I'd like to establish an anti-Latin alliance of the northern nations." He slipped and staggered wildly, losing the thread of his thought and the hegemony of northern Europe in the same moment.

Nat touched Ann's arm. She was very pale, and he knew that she was not enjoying her wedding. He supposed that she was disappointed by the furtive ceremony. It was a damned shame to fob a girl off with a show like this. Feeling like a criminal himself he could do nothing for her . . . he had not even been nice to her that morning. He was overcome by remorse and smiled at her lovingly when he handed her into the taxi. She gave him over her shoulder a clear look.

Emily gazed out of the window of the taxi as it dodged through the streets. She had not spoken since the dreadful business was over except to say doubtfully: "I hope you'll be happy, Ann darling. I don't suppose you will. No one ever is." Nat shouted with laughter, more like a boy than a twice-married man, his mother thought, and felt again a fugitive pity for a

forgotten Denny. She wondered whether Nat ever remembered her and thought that he did, sometimes with loathing; and sometimes with a pang of grief for an irrecoverable delight. There must, she thought, be mornings when he wakes and hearing a bird sing over and over (like a trickle of cool water) in the fresh clear-shining world outside remembers what it was like to be very young and in love with Denny; and can hardly bear it. And at that Emily began to be sorry for Ann, who must long for that young Nat but had to put up with the uncertain moody creature he had become. In the moment between the stopping of the taxi at Daniel's door and her descent from it her mind threw a sudden blinding light across the relations between Ann and Nat. Nat would be nothing—a dumb resistance of overstrained nerves to life—without Ann. He turned to her at every point. He makes no bones about being very fond of her, Emily thought; he'll even try to please her. But he doesn't live in her. He's attached to her for rations and discipline, she said to herself, smiling, as she went up the stairs to Fanny's room. She'll discipline him, the young thing, and feed him, with strength and belief: and admiration, she added, catching Ann's quick glance at Nat. Emily was shocked: she did not think it good for Nat to be so thoroughly admired.

She took Ann's arm in the doorway. "Don't let Nat worry you," she whispered. "He'll wear you out if you'll let him."

Ann smiled. Once inside the room she went to sit at the window, thankful that no one was paying any attention to her. On her wedding day. Fanny had no eyes for anyone but Nat; she made him sit on the bed beside her, where he flirted shamelessly with his aunt, provoking Daniel. To cover his annoyance Daniel began a bitter dispute with Emily. It went on and on, Daniel sunk in gloom and Emily beating up and down the room like an angry little owl. Ann listened to them and watched Nat. She thought: He has loathed being married, in that room, with that

revolting sneezing creature covering us with germs: I wish we hadn't married at all. Panic seized her. Suppose Nat grew tired of her. He would try not to give himself away, but she would know it at once. And she would not be able now just to go away: they were married and another divorce was not to be borne. One had been nearly too much for Nat. If his wife (she could not help thinking of Denny as Nat's wife) had chosen to stop it, he would not have fought her. Not even if she, Ann, had begged him to make a fight of it; of course she would never have done that. . . . Nat was laughing at something Fanny had said, making love to her openly and disgracefully. Ann's heart moved in her side. Don't get tired of me, she repeated silently; you're so beautiful: I shall die if you do. But she knew that to be silly: she was far too strong to die of anything so intangible.

"There!" Emily said fiercely. "You've done nothing to justify yourself at all. When James was in your place everyone respected him. No one respects you. Who cares what England says now?"

"Times have changed," Daniel said bitterly.

"You haven't changed," Emily retorted. "You Liberals are still trying to run the country on platitudes and no-Popery. And nobody cares what you think. Why don't you *do* something?"

Ann laid her cheek against the window. I ought to do something myself, she thought. Not sit here letting everyone ignore me. She got up and walked across the room. Nat put an arm round her, absently. "I'd like to go now," she breathed in his ear.

"What did you say?" Nat exclaimed.

"Nothing," Ann said hurriedly. "Nothing of importance." She freed herself from his arm and wandered away. He ought not to have spoken aloud: he should have known that if she whispered it was between them. The door opened and Lily brought in tea, with a dreadful iced cake which Ann suspected of being a wedding-cake; she hoped fervently that Fanny would not call attention to it. Hastily cutting off a few slices, she arranged them on

a plate and pushed the thing behind a bowl of flowers where it remained unnoticed for the rest of the afternoon. If it is my wedding-cake, Ann said to herself, it's a very poor one; but what could I expect after behaving so badly? She smiled, to cover a sharp momentary longing for safety and an ordinary life.

"Daniel," Fanny called, "come here. You haven't given Nat a wedding present."

"I've offered him one," Daniel said grimly. "He can take it or not as he pleases."

"What can you do with a man like that!" Fanny cried. "He audits all my accounts. I believe he's a miser."

"You spent thirty shillings last week on stamps," Daniel said. "What you really spent it on I shall never know."

Nat thought Ann looked tired. He came and stood beside her. "Let's go home," he whispered. "I've had enough of this."

"You never gave me a wedding present," Ann whispered back.

Nat looked at her in dismay. He hurried her out of the room, hardly giving her time to say goodbye to his mother or to Fanny. Daniel said: "I've put a hundred pounds to your account, Ann." She thanked him politely, struggling with a wish that he had told her less publicly, and he shut the door, leaving her and Nat alone on the staircase. Nat seized her in his arms. "I never remember anything," he groaned. "I'm a selfish brute. *Damn.*"

"Come to that," Ann murmured, "I haven't given you one."

"Have you any money?" Nat demanded.

"No. Yes, a hundred pounds."

"There you are. I don't even give you any money. I'm worse than my father. Oh Ann."

His furious self-disgust upset Ann. "You mustn't mind so much about little things," she said wonderingly. "It makes me have to be so careful what I say to you. Can we have a taxi home please? I'm tired."

He held her in his arms in the taxi and thought that no one

could have had a more disappointing wedding day than Ann. He had not done the least thing to make it pleasant for her. He had been thinking of himself and his resentments, taking them out on her, making her feel guilty and unhappy. His arm tightened. He would say nothing more: in a moment, if he opened his mouth, he would be imploring and she giving him comfort for his ill-temper and carelessness. I'm careless of you, Ann, he said to himself. Careless: and I love you.

Ann actually was tired. Nat half carried her up the stairs to the flat and set her down in her room.

"You've had a rotten day," he said, ashamed to look at her.

Ann took his face in her hands. "You said this morning: I wish this damned business were over."

"I'm sorry, Ann."

"Oh it's not that." Ann said hurriedly. "But I thought. Perhaps you were regretting it."

"Regretting you. Good God, is that what you think?"

Ann turned away. "Well, I'm glad if you don't; we're going to have a son. I expect it will be a son."

She looked at her husband's dark head, below her chin, and wanted desperately to tell him that now he must take Daniel's offer. She wanted Saints Rew for her baby. More than anything in the world she wanted the lawn and the orchards for him to grow in. . . . A tiny serious child (he was small for his age) climbed the shallow stairs to the place where she stood waiting for him; slowly, helping himself up by his hands, glancing up at her as he neared the top. "Be careful," she said to him. "Clever little love." . . . I must have Saints Rew, she thought, clenching her hands in anguish. I must, I must.

She knew that she would say nothing. Nat must do what he chose. She knew in her heart that whatever he did would seem if not right to her, inevitable. I'm really nothing without him, she thought: even my baby is for him, I only want him for Nat. Her hands relaxed. She lifted one of them, to smooth Nat's hair.

C H A P T E R xxvi

EMILY sat in her room. The afternoon sun, flooding in through open windows, had given to faded amber velvet the inward glow of old wine. Emily lived in this sitting-room so little that there was hardly anything of hers in it, except a book face downward on the window seat and a frightened-looking work-basket that seemed unable to accustom itself to Emily's erratic descents.

She was going to the dower cottage. Whatever happened to Saints Rew she would have, for the rest of her life, the low thatched house (itself something of a show place) let for the last fifteen years to the old War Office general who came for the fishing. It had an enclosed garden, a tiny paddock, and two pear trees against the wall. She did not care what Nat did with Saints Rew. She, Emily Grimshaw, was free of it. It could do nothing more to her. . . . Ann wanted the house, Nat said. Ann, Emily thought calmly, is a fool to risk sharing her husband with such a rival. What chance had Ann against Saints Rew? She would live, if they kept the place, to see Nat stealing clothes, looks, kisses, days and nights from her to give them to the house. She would fight, with that quiet obstinacy of hers, and lose.

She saw Ann cross the lawn in the direction of the house. Emily closed her eyes. When she opened them again the garden was empty, a wide green court set about with glowing borders, from which every now and then a butterfly detached itself like a loosened flower. The air was quivering with heat, and filled with a murmur of bees that of itself would have made the afternoon seem warm and scented. She forgot Ann. . . . She saw

Nat coming across the grass. This being the first day of his holidays he had visited (she knew) every place to make sure that nothing had been changed. Emily watched him when he halted beside the great bush of peonies: slender body in shabby clothes, head half averted so that all she saw was a smooth flushed cheek, on which the curving lashes lay still. He looked up and smiled his boy's enchanting smile. She had him to herself. There was as yet no Oxford, no Denny, even no Ann. Ann was a little girl, a queer silent clumsy little girl. . . . A small boy sitting frowning beside the river with a borrowed rod. "Don't speak, mother. You'll disturb them." He landed a young trout. She took it off for him and laid it down while he busied himself with the line. When he came to look at his first fish it had just gasped its last there on the grass. He was horrified. He flung himself down beside it in an agony of remorse and tried to kiss it back to life. "I never knew it would be like this. You ought to have told me, mother." Kissing it! Poor bewildered hurt baby. But the fish was cooked for his tea and he ate it very cheerfully. He did plenty of fishing after that. But she could not afford to buy him a rod and the one Fanny gave him was too small. . . .

It came to Emily that her life, which she had thought of as almost empty, had actually been heavy with events. They crowded upon her, her childhood on a vast neglected estate, long days when life seemed sharper and more poignant than she could bear, going up to town when her turn came to be married off, falling in love with James Grimshaw. A cloud of memories came about her then, shy, delicate, shot through with tears and laughter, they hung about her, James forgetting her (yes, even in those days), remembering her again in a rush of shamed tenderness, James sitting with her after Nat was born, saying doubtfully: "It's a very small baby, isn't it?" smiling at her instinctive gesture. . . . There were other memories, Fanny,

lovely fashionable Fanny, flirting with a tiny Nat . . . her son's absorbed face when Fanny kissed him. Emily felt again the pang of jealousy. "Don't tease the child, Fanny." "He likes it. Look at him." She knew he did; he was enchanted with Fanny. . . .

Oh, Emily said, and closed her eyes again on the garden and the frail amber hangings, oh life, life. Not too little. Too much life, too many events. . . . Lord, now lettest thou thy servant . . . she had had more than her share, more happiness, less grief, than any woman could have expected. James, Nat, Saints Rew, love, marriage, the peace after giving birth, delight in a small quick body. Dizzy with memories, Emily Grimshaw leaned her head against the stone mouldings of the window. The very room, so little hers (because of her restless flitting from room to room in search of something that all the time was waiting for her here) was friendly. As for the garden; in all its centuries of being a garden, Emily thought, it was never perfect until today. Now I know, she said to herself, why no turf is ever so fine, no flowers so glowing, as in a very old garden. I love you, she said to Saints Rew; I love you, to the child she still saw, pausing now beside the bush of southernwood, I shall always love you, till I die.

Her hand caressed the frail velvet of the window cushions as if she had never noticed it before. . . .

Nat had taken himself up to the edge of the downs above Saints Rew. He had to come to some decision about the place, and he had to come to it alone. Though Ann had said nothing, he knew, by one of those silent channels of communication between his mind and Ann's, that she wanted him to keep it. But she left him free. Even his father left him free. James had never said: "Promise me to keep Saints Rew if you can." He was too decent for that. He imposed nothing on his descendants, not even his memories. When Nat began to look for his father's personal papers he found only a handful, in one drawer of his desk;

two letters in Emily Grimshaw's indecipherable handwriting, a miniature of a little girl in a sleeveless frock (Emily? No, his grandmother, his father's mother), a record of all the things sold from the house during the last few years, with the names and addresses of the buyers, all private sales, nothing to dealers, a sheet of paper on which James had written: "The monstrous incivility of war. The whole thing is a question of good manners: to be civil to guests at the same table. This I believe," a photograph of a boy in riding kit, so faded that with difficulty Nat made it out to be Daniel, and an invitation to dinner at Marlborough House. Nothing else, hardly anything that touched his marriage, one or two gestures, faint and alluring, of his youth, and a credo too short to bring in any royalties (Daniel was writing his autobiography, said to run already to three volumes): Saints Rew bulked largest in the little heap of papers.

Nat's heart turned in his body when he thought of selling Saints Rew. There was no need. He could manage to keep it up. A tenth of Grimshaw and Grimshaw's profits was worth more than it had been in 1914. With that and the increased salary he could just do it. And when the firm came to him, as it would (Daniel, disapproving of him, would yet not, if he kept his share of the bargain, leave the money away from him), he could restore to it all that James had sold. All and more, buy more things for it, make it lovelier than his father had. And Ann wanted it too. He had seen Ann looking into all the bedrooms, one after the other; she examined each carefully, in silence. A sudden realisation that she was planning her nurseries caught him at the throat. She was such a child to be disappointed.

Nat rolled himself over on the warm turf, with his arms stretched out beyond his head. Sweat broke out on his forehead and the palms of his hands. He could not imagine himself cut off from Saints Rew. And he could not give up everything else to keep it. With a kind of horror of himself he realised that as

much as he loved it he hated it. He hated it for his mother's shabby clothes, and, though he had forgotten it, for a girl's cool smile at his scarecrow jacket and cracked pumps. . . . Though the house had been stripped of its finest treasures it would bring him in, if he sold it, enough money for his mother, enough, just enough, for himself and Ann and Ann's baby, until he earned them more. He could give up Grimshaw and Grimshaw, that colossal profit-making machine. Could go back to his work. Could—seeing himself for a moment with James Grimshaw's ironical clear-sight—live for himself, an unremarkable scientist, following obscurely the light vouchsafed him in company with Perry Smith, Charles Dumain and young Leslie. That a man, once out of this, had better find something of his own to do. Quickly. Before he went bad. . . . "Wouldn't it be *bloody*," Philip Leslie said dreamily, "to grow fat." He stretched out his young sapling body and took a lighted match from Nat. "Hi, Leslie! You make three. Sheer bravado, I call that!" . . . If I stay with Grimshaw and Grimshaw, Nat said, I shall get fat. . . . Daniel did four miles round his bedroom on his stomach. . . . Well, fat-minded, which was worse.

He was laying down a responsibility. This for the second time; Denny being the first. So. He had once wanted Saints Rew for Denny; who was nothing now, a diminishing speck whirling away from him. Let them both go, the past burying its dead. He got to his feet and ran down the road, chalk-white and airless between high hedges.

Losing patience halfway up the great staircase he called: "Ann. Ann, where are you?" Ann's voice answered him from their room. He shut the door and stood with his back against it, looking at her.

"I can't, Ann," he said. His eyes, the eyes of an anxious boy, searched her face.

"All right," Ann said. She did not ask him for reasons. She

knew what had happened. Her mind followed involuntarily the complexities and bewilderments of his. There was no need even to tell him that she agreed, that what he did, she, his wife, approved of. Not because she wanted to approve but because she could not help herself. She did not want him to keep Saints Rew to please her. No good ever came of that, of forcing a man out of his line. Nat might have given in to her, and in the end she would have paid as dearly as he, seeing him discouraged and . . . gone flat.

He flung himself across the room crying: "Ann. Bless you." "There," Ann said. "There . . . oh my sweet, oh my dear, oh my little one." She stroked his face and talked to him, adding to those human records, kept only in men's minds, of the things women find to say to their lovers. All the time she was looking round the room, from the lovely slender posts of the bed to the old wine-coloured damask on the chairs, the beeswaxed panelling, and the low wide window framing the park, with the small deer standing about under its trees, and the blue line of hills; thinking that these would not be the first things her little son saw, as she had meant them to be; and wondering what the bed would be like in which he was born. Would Nat let her take this one away? If he knew how much she had wanted his son to be born in it?

Late that night she was still awake. A candle flickered in the depths of the room, repeating itself in a dozen tiny jewel-faced flames in the depths of the walnut cupboard, the edge of a mirror, and the dulled lustre of the floor. Ann's eyes were heavy with sleep, but she sat up and watched Nat leaning out of the window. . . . Two buttons were missing from the jacket of his pyjamas. Ann sighed. I shall forget to sew them on, she thought anxiously. How can I remind myself?

"Nat."

Nat turned his head. "Just one minute more, Ann, while I finish looking."

"You always want just one minute more. You're like a child. . . . Nat. Don't mind so much. You can buy it back afterwards—if Daniel leaves you his money. He may, after all."

"Never. Never." Nat sounded choked and fierce. "I won't lay such a burden on the boy."

He came back to her, blowing out the candle as he came. In the half-dusk of a June night she could just make out his face, kind, loving her. "Are you very disappointed, Ann?"

She recalled here, as a woman would, that he had wanted to give his house to Denny. He did not want to give it to her.

"No. . . . You look so young, Nat."

"I'm not old." He brought his face closer to hers. That, and the light pressure of his arm made her dizzy. "I don't want anything except you, Ann."

"Is it really so?"

"Don't you know it is?"

Ann sighed. "Yes. I know. I know you."

For the moment everything else was shadowy to him, his work, his nagging desires, all his future. It grieved him to think that his son would not grow up at Saints Rew and he hoped fervently that the boy would not afterwards feel that his father had done him out of an inheritance. But the instinct that had led a Sebastian Grimshaw to buy Saints Rew, to dig himself in there, to plan for his son and his grandson to hold the place in a firm and ever firmer grasp, was lacking in Nat. The ground had moved too convincingly under his feet for him to feel any confidence in its continued stability. When his son was grown, there might be no Saints Rew. No England. . . . Each man had to travel his own road these days, and travel light, Nat thought sleepily. He had all he wanted, almost all, a job of work to do as decently as he could, his wife, and a son to his

body. What more? . . . He had Ann to thank for this second chance . . . the girl at his side. . . . Ann had not said when it would be. . . . Ann . . . he must ask her tomorrow . . . be kind . . . tomorrow. . . .

Nat fell asleep. The old house, while he slept, spoke to him with irony, with resignation, with love. But shut in the little circle of Ann's arm, he did not hear it.

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